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Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office.

March 22, 1893.

No. 480.

\$2.50
a Year.

Published Weekly by Beadle and Adams,
No. 98 WILLIAM ST. NEW YORK.

Price,
Five Cents.

Vol. XXXVII.



'ROSE! ROSE!' HE SHOUTED, FORGETTING IN HIS EXCITEMENT THAT NO HUMAN LIFE COULD
EXIST IN THAT APARTMENT FOR A MOMENT.

The Village Sport;

OR,

The Young Mechanic's Muster.

BY JAMES L. BOWEN.

CHAPTER I.

ROSE JONSON.

It was years ago. Many of the great western cities were then but small villages, and quite as many which are to-day swarming hives of industry, were unexplored by the foot of white men. Many hundred miles away over the wide plains which make our western States, stood a little village. Not more than a dozen dwellings had been built, yet in the eyes of its inhabitants it was a settled fact that soon a growing city would rise from this collection of cabins. The soil was fertile to an unusual degree; water and wood were plenty; and what was of especial importance in those days when the application of steam had not become universal, water-power was at hand, and it seemed in force sufficient to meet all the possible needs of a third or fourth-rate city.

Having all these things in view, Maurice Jonson had bought a large tract of land from the United States, and proceeded to erect mills and build a house for himself. Being possessed of considerable influence in the vicinity from which he came, Jonson soon induced a dozen families to settle near him, and there the matter rested at the time when our story opens.

It was late in the autumn; a turkey-shoot and raffle had occupied the day, and, as the sun sunk low, the male inhabitants could be seen in small and large groups, making their way homeward.

In front of the mill, where the raffle had occurred, a group of some half a dozen men were standing, most of them quite young. As they were gathered in a knot, previous to seeking their several homes, a young woman appeared at a little distance, and passed them with a light and graceful step.

"There goes the gal I'm goin' to make a wife of!" said one of the party, a tall, muscular fellow.

The party in question laughed, while one of them remarked:

"Don't be too sure of that, Jerry; *she* may have something to say."

The one addressed as Jerry regarded the other with a half-pitying look, and finally drawled out:

"See here, if *I* say it, there'll be somebody sick if 'tain't so."

"Who is the young lady?" asked a third party.

The speaker, in this case, was a young man about the size of Jerry, but dressed in a manner which denoted that he had recently visited older communities than that in which he was stopping. Such was the fact. Lawrence Estey was his name, and a peculiar history was his.

Thrown early upon the world, with no direct-

ing hand, he had still applied himself to wisdom, so that at twenty-four years of age, he was a thorough mechanic, possessing a knowledge of the most useful branches of mechanical science. Maurice Jonson had been acquainted with him, and desiring just such a man to assist him, had sent a proposal which the young man accepted. He had arrived the previous day, and was mingling with the citizens of the village for the first time.

The one who had spoken to Jerry at once responded to his question:

"Why, don't you know her? That is Jonson's niece!"

"So I thought," was the courteous reply; "though I did not see her features."

Jerry turned at once to the young mechanic and while every feature showed that he was inclined to quarrel, he remarked:

"Maybe you've got sunthin' to say, acause ye're kinder big with her old uncle! But you jest 'tend to yer own bizness, and I'll mind mine. Will ye?"

The young man regarded his interlocutor for a few moments as if uncertain how to reply, and then merely remarked:

"Of course."

"And mind ye, no blabbin' about what I said," he added, catching Estey by the shoulder as he would have turned away.

The young man threw off the hand which sought to detain him, and made his way from the vicinity. He knew that Jerry was half drunk, and wished to avoid any quarrel with him.

The latter did not follow, but contented himself with gazing after the young man for some time, and giving vent to his feelings in language neither refined nor gentlemanly.

Jerry Buffin, regarded as the Village Sport, was impulsive and unreasonable at times, sometimes foud of strong drink, and, when partially intoxicated, often quarrelsome.

It had been known for some time that he had a decided passion for Rose Jonson, and many predicted that he would succeed in winning her hand. As Rose was the only young lady in the village at that time of marriageable standing, the contest among the numerous swains gave promise of being spirited.

As already indicated, Rose was not the daughter, but the niece of Maurice Jonson, founder of the village. She had been left without parents at the age of four years, and it was the dying request of her father that his brother Maurice, who had no children, should adopt and care for her as though she were his own flesh and blood. Accordingly their home had been her home, and pleasant had been her life thus far.

Eighteen years had passed over her head, leaving her beautiful and winning. Hosts of anxious ones had sought her favor, but the jealous uncle, who would have died rather than resign his charge into the hands of one whom he could not implicitly trust, had cut short all approaches for the present, by declaring that Rose was not old enough to choose for herself, and he should not allow any one to warp her judgment.

Lawrence Estey had met her two or three

times since his arrival, and each felt that they had formed an agreeable companion in the other. Certainly nothing further than this. If Lawrence had any thoughts awakened by Jerry's remarks, they were not yet really defined.

It was two or three days after the incident just related, that all the young people of the village joined in an excursion upon the mountains lying just back of the place. The idea was to gather a supply of nuts for the winter, and this was the ostensible errand which called them to the hills. But, more truly, the project embraced a social afternoon spent in the wild solitudes of nature.

In all respects, the gathering was a success. Huge piles of rich brown nuts were heaped up where they could be conveniently removed by the young men upon the following day, and then the party devoted themselves to merry-making. The reader will understand that "young people," as applied to the inhabitants of our settlement, included more than is usually understood by the term. Not only the youths and maidens were there, but children and married people, the former frequently accompanied by their parents.

During all the latter portion of the afternoon, the wooded hills resounded with their merry laughter, as they dashed through the forest with all the freedom of children.

Rose Jonson was present, and wherever she moved was the center of attraction. Though generally accompanied by her uncle and aunt, who had joined her in the sports of the day, and necessarily much in the company of Lawrence Estey, yet others were ever lingering at her side, anxious to show their devotion in any manner possible.

Without showing especial favor to any of the gallants who swarmed near her, Rose was in fine spirits, and enjoyed herself in an unusual degree. There was nothing of coquetry in her nature, and while enjoying herself thus keenly, the maiden did not realize that she was kindling the flame yet more fiercely in the breasts of all her admirers. She had intended giving preference to none. If she was more in the presence of Lawrence Estey, it was because he was comparatively a stranger in the place and her uncle's guest. As to loving him, or any one else, she had no idea of it. Yet, new emotions and fearfully strange experiences were to flow from the adventures of that day.

"Come, my dears," said Mr. Jonson, playfully addressing his niece and wife, "it is time for us to go home. If we stay much longer, your heads will get so light, we shall all fall off the poles."

The trio turned their steps homeward, and a dozen followed. A few preferred to remain a short time longer, as it was not yet sunset.

While crossing a slight valley between two of the hills, they came to the stream which supplied their water-power a short distance below. At some points the stream was quite deep, while at others it was allowed to flow in a broader current. At one of the narrowest places, it had been bridged by the settlers for their own convenience, in the most primitive way. Two small trees had been felled across the stream, side by side, and upon these, lying as they had

fallen, pedestrians crossed. The stream beneath was not broad, but deep and black, the waters moving with resistless power.

This was the place referred to by Maurice Jonson as "the poles," and though somewhat dangerous to any one possessing unsteady nerves, no accident had happened there thus far. With perfect assurance, the person in question led the way, followed by his wife and Rose.

As Maurice nearly gained the opposite side, a fourth person sprung upon the frail bridge with a bound. It swayed so much and so suddenly, that Rose, who was midway between the two ends, lost her footing and slipped into the water. She uttered a cry at the moment, and her aunt, after turning, grasped to save her. But instead of accomplishing that, lost her own balance, and found herself in the water in a moment.

Here was a double catastrophe. The two women were struggling in the current, which bore them along as though they were so much legitimate booty placed in its keeping. It was a moment for promptness. And yet Mr. Jonson stood clasping his hands, and seemed utterly unconscious how to act. The excitement of the moment had quite paralyzed his faculties.

Several rushed to the bank, and then they stopped to consider. The water was cold and deep, in addition to the fact that it swept along with great force. The women were in the midst of the stream, and while endeavoring to assist each other, both had sunk below the dark surface.

Jerry Buffin reached the edge of the stream, and there he paused. But a small portion of a garment or two was visible, and that much nearer the other bank than the one upon which he stood. One or two started wildly for the bridge, hoping to gain the other side, and thus render some assistance. Yet during all these precious moments no prompt action had taken place for the rescue of the endangered ones.

Long as the time seemed, it was really but a few moments before Lawrence Estey reached the place. He had been some distance in the rear, but sprung forward on hearing a cry of distress. Dashing aside those who stood in his way, he plunged into the cold flood and struggled till he succeeded in getting within reach of the floating garments. They were more exposed now, and grasping one, he succeeded in raising the woman to the surface. It was Mrs. Jonson.

At the same moment his feet struck upon an unseen rock, and bracing himself so as to resist the force of the current, he passed one arm about the woman he had thus partially extricated from the cold flood, and seized the other garment as it was sweeping past.

A long struggle followed, but he finally succeeded in dragging Rose partially from the water. But, here his power ceased. He could not leave the rock and hope to breast the swelling current with both of his senseless burdens, neither could he relinquish one while he placed the other in safety. His own strength, too, might fail at any moment, for the exertion which he had passed through had been very severe.

But help was at hand. Those who had been

appalled by the suddenness of the accident, had now regained their presence of mind. Strong hands not only relieved Lawrence of his burdens but assisted him to the shore.

Both the women were insensible upon being brought to land, but speedily gained consciousness under the ministrations of ardent friends. Neither had been injured beyond the fright and shock of immersion in the chilling flood.

The party which took its way toward the village a few moments later, looked far different from that which had left the nutting-grounds a few minutes before. Yet all were glad that the accident had terminated so fortunately, while the praise of Lawrence Estey dwelt upon every tongue.

In a moment the young mechanic had become the popular personage in the entire settlement. If there were any who envied his laurels, it was those who had shrunk back from the danger which he so bravely incurred. But, it was too late now to undo what was done, and they, too, joined in his praise.

That evening, in the house of Maurice Jonson, the young man received more encomiums than had ever been bestowed upon him before. And when Rose put her soft arms about his neck, and told him what a dear good man he was to help her aunt and herself so much, a spring in the youth's breast was touched, and a door, of which he had no previous knowledge, flew open. And in at that door came a bright little image, making all gladness and sunshine there. That image was LOVE! Lawrence Estey knew it now, and from that time forth his heart was lighter and happier than it ever had been before.

CHAPTER II.

OH, WHERE?

SIX months have passed since the incidents recorded in the opening chapter. Although not marked by any especially striking incidents, the time had been full of progress to some of those whom we mentioned therein.

Lawrence Estey had become the avowed lover of his employer's darling niece, and not only was his suit acceptable to the maiden herself, but it was smiled upon by Maurice and his wife. Sooner or later, they knew that their home would be despoiled of its chief ornament, and to none would they more willingly commit the happiness of Rose than to him.

Indeed, matters had progressed so far that a day for the wedding had been agreed upon, and the routine of life after the marriage discussed. The uncle and aunt could not consent that the one in whose society they had so much pleasure, should leave their roof—not for the present, at least. Their house had ample accommodations for all, and they would be immensely pleased to have Lawrence remain with them. And to this the young man finally consented. He had boarded with them since entering Mr. Jonson's employ, and their relations would not be so very different in the future.

The day was near. So near, that but two more circuits of the sun separated it from that which was fading away. Lawrence sought his

pillow with strange feelings of happiness. Already he had counted the hours which must elapse before he should reach the climax of his joy—when he could clasp the adored one to his heart, and defy the world to dispute his right!

Thinking thus, he finally sunk to sleep. Not to rest soundly, for many disturbing dreams of mingled happiness and sorrow filled his brain. But finally these passed away, and he slept as calmly as though the great event of his life was not close at hand.

Of course, the success of Lawrence had not been without its effect upon the other admirers of Rose. One by one had withdrawn upon finding their claim hopeless, and last of all, Jerry Buffin had ceased to aspire for that which was plainly beyond his reach.

Occasionally, some who had been equally disappointed with himself, would rally the fellow upon his former declarations that Rose should be his bride, and *his* only, but Jerry kept his counsels, if any he had.

"Rose and that 'ere upstart ain't married yit," was all he chose to say. And yet everybody in the place understood that the time was not far distant.

How long Lawrence had slept he knew not. But it seemed to him that morning must be nearly come, if not quite, when he was awakened by some strange disturbance without. Men were running hither and thither, and confused sounds reached his ears.

What could be the cause of the commotion he knew not, but raised himself in bed to listen. Ah, he heard it in a moment more!

"Fire! fire!" yelled the voice of a modern Stentor, almost beneath his window.

Springing from his couch, the young man looked forth. He could see no signs, and feeling sure that it was not in that vicinity, slipped on his clothing and rushed out, as the doors were burst open, and an excited crowd rushed in.

"What is the matter?" he demanded. "What does this mean?"

At the same time Mr. Jonson appeared, followed by his wife. All were now present save Rose, and as the crowd pressed toward that portion of the house where her sleeping-apartment was situated, a dreadful fear seized the young man's mind. Springing in front of the foremost he bounded up the stairs, and reached the door of her apartment first.

The house of Jonson had been built with much more of pretension than is usual in such settlements, being framed, two stories in height, and well furnished. One of the rooms upon the second floor had been selected by Rose, and fitted up under her own directions. It was reached by a passage of considerable length, running from the landing of the stairs.

As Lawrence reached the upper floor he was half stifled by the smoke which filled all parts of the chambers. Grasping the handle to the door of Rose's apartment, he found that it was fastened. This might have been expected, since it was the maiden's practice to lock her door when alone.

It was not a time to pause. There might be danger if a moment were lost in delay, and by

the full exertion of his strength, Lawrence burst the door open.

What a sight met his eyes!

The room was a mass of sheeted flame. The hot air, smoke and cinders flew into the hall, while jets of flame burst from the open door with such intensity that even Estey, half frantic as he was, shrunk back, utterly unable to face them.

"Rose! Rose!" he shouted, forgetting in his excitement that no human life could exist in that apartment for a moment.

Of course there came no response.

"Oh, my darling Rose! Save her—save her!" cried the uncle, as he reached the scene.

The aunt saw the flames bursting forth from the apartment, and realizing the dreadful state of affairs, sunk down in a state of unconsciousness.

Two or three of the men in the hall, though half choked by the smoke, and utterly unable to breathe, on hearing the appeal of the distracted uncle, endeavored to force their way in through the mouth of the fiery cavern. But none of them succeeded. With scorched garments, crisped hair and whiskers, and blistered faces, they returned.

Lawrence Estey succeeded more nearly than any of the others, so near, indeed, that he almost found a fiery tomb. He succeeded in passing the portals of the apartment, but found the heat and flame so intense that he was forced to turn back. Of course, he could see nothing, and instead of repassing through the door, he struck against the wall. Not knowing which way to turn, he again struck out, wildly, only to find himself more deeply involved in the heated furnace. Here reason failed, and he sunk to the floor, quite unconscious of his fearful fate.

A providential lifting of the smoke at that moment, saved him from being burned to death. Some of those without caught a glimpse of his form, and succeeded in drawing him forth, while comparatively unharmed.

"It's no use, sir," said one of the men, pulling Maurice Jonson back, as he endeavored to rush into the flaming abyss. "Lawrence tried it, and we had to pull him out."

"But, poor Rose!" cried the crazed man. "What will become of her?"

"If she's there, it is all over with her, long ago," was the reply. "Course no person could live in such a room as that."

"But we may recover her body," he continued, still struggling to free himself.

"Never mind that. Better save your own life, than throw it away in trying any thing of the sort."

And thus speaking, the rough, but kind-hearted men drew him away, and all commenced the work of removing such goods as were most likely to be injured by the flames. Of saving the building there was no longer any hope, as they had no means of combating the fire to advantage. The most that could be reasonably hoped, was to save the furniture, and prevent the spread of the flames to the other buildings.

This they succeeded in doing, by constant exertion. When morning came it found the noble building just tottering to its fall. Awe and fear sat upon every countenance. Not only was the

conflagration in itself a severe blow to the rising young village, but there was another and more fearful cause of dismay.

Rose, the beautiful and beloved, had met a fearful fate within those burning walls! Such a blow had never fallen upon that young community before, and beneath the dreadful visitation more than a score of hearts lay bleeding and appalled.

Just as the full glow of the rising sun fell upon the mournful spectacle, the walls tottered and fell. Great showers of sparks and cinders flew upward, followed by a thick vail of smoke, that seemed to shut off the sun's rays. Then bright jets of flame shot up, burning with a fierce and fiery glow, as if proud of the work they had done.

More than one anguished groan went up from stricken hearts as the ruins fell, as though the life-blood was crushed from their mangled bosoms by the falling timbers. To Lawrence, Maurice and his wife, the blow was severer than any other which could have been given. She who had been the light and joy of her guardian's home for so many years, and who was so soon to assume new and holier relations to the heartbroken young man, was gone! And oh, in what a fearful manner had her young life gone forth!

Repeatedly did each blame himself that no greater exertions had been made in her behalf; though the condition of Lawrence, with clothing utterly ruined, his hands and face blistered, and hair almost completely burned away, showed that he, at least, could have done no more, without giving his life, an unavailing sacrifice, in the attempt.

But there lay the smoldering ruins, and nothing more could be done till the fire-demon should have exhausted itself. Under these circumstances the afflicted family yielded to the persuasions of friends, and repaired to the nearest dwelling, where a smoking breakfast had been prepared for all who had joined in attempts to save the surrounding property from destruction.

Of course the family ate nothing, but all appreciated the efforts of friends in their behalf. For a short time they remained in the dwelling; and then passed forth, to gaze again upon the scene where lay the wreck of so many hopes.

It was not till afternoon that it was possible to remove the debris, so as to recover the bones of the lost. Then work commenced. The spot where they would most likely be found was marked, and careful hands cleared away the still heated rubbish.

Slowly, carefully they worked, till the earth was reached, and nothing had been found for which they searched. Disappointed at this result, a careful calculation was made, and the opinion arrived at that the falling of the building might have carried the remains further inward.

"Be very careful, men," said Jonson, as willing hands commenced work in the new direction. "I would not have a bone injured for the whole State!"

And so they were removing every coal and cinder separately, scanning each to make sure of its character. But all in vain; nothing bear-

for the least resemblance to human bones rewarded their search.

"Can it be that the fire was so hot as to destroy even them?" Maurice asked. "Who will tell me if the thing be possible?"

A general negative was given. No one ever had known a fire hot enough to destroy the character of bones, especially when coated with flesh. Cases to the point were related, and when satisfied upon that point Jonson ordered the work to proceed.

"They must be here, somewhere," he said, "and I will reward the man handsomely who first finds them."

The men needed no prospect of reward. All were anxious to render what assistance they could. Before night every inch of the cellar had been examined, every stick, coal and cinder carefully overhauled, but nothing produced. All admitted, even to Jonson, that the fierce heat must have decomposed the bones entirely.

And so, with heavy hearts, the search was abandoned, and one after another betook themselves to their home. Mr. Jonson had accepted the urgent invitation of his friends to occupy a part of the best house in the place, until they could build another for him.

It was quite late at night before the family were in a condition which permitted Lawrence Estey to seek the side of his friend. When the opportunity did present, however, he quietly remarked.

"Come and take a walk, Mr. Jonson; I wish to ask your advice."

The stricken man rose, half mechanically, and followed his young friend forth into the open air. It was a pleasant evening, and the young moon looked down from the west with just a sufficiency of silver rays to reveal the deep shades upon the face of nature.

"Do you know," said Lawrence, when sure that no listener overheard them, taking his friend by the arm, "do you know that Rose was not burned in that chamber?"

There was something so strange in the tones of the speaker that his companion turned and gazed fixedly upon him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, seeing the other was candid in the avowal.

"I mean what I say. Had she been burned there we should have found some traces. That fire resulted from no carelessness upon her part; it was kindled to cover some other deed!"

"For heaven's sake, Lawrence, what do you mean? You speak as though you had some secret in regard to the matter."

"Would I had, for then I might unravel the mystery. But I am certain of what I say. She was taken away before the house was set on fire."

"How do you know this? Where is she, if such be the case?"

"There you have an advantage over me. I cannot prove this thing, unfortunately, and yet I am fully satisfied in my own mind that it is a fact. Neither do I know where she is; she may not be alive, though I think it is likely she is."

"But who would do this? We have no enemies who could seek to injure us through her?"

"It may have been done for revenge. I have heard of such things, and certainly this was a rich opportunity for it. More than one doubtless felt sore over the fact that I was soon to marry Rose. May it not have been that some one took this means to wreak vengeance upon us all?"

"My friend," said Maurice Jonson, slowly and in a candid manner, "I fear you are mistaken. Surely no one would be so fiendish as to seek revenge in this way. They could hardly have murdered her; to take her away bodily would be a far from easy task. I fear we must abandon all hopes of seeing her again upon earth."

But Lawrence had a well-balanced mind, and, after reflecting a short time, he bent near his friend, and in a low tone, which no listeners could have overheard, he poured forth his reasons for thinking as he did. For an hour the twain conversed, and when they slowly walked back to the building they had left, Maurice had confessed that the young man's views were quite reasonable.

CHAPTER III.

NEWS.

BUT little sleep visited the eyes of the uncle or lover of the missing girl that night. Both were awake most of the time, and each busy with their own thoughts.

Maurice was trying to persuade himself that something had happened to Rose which accounted for her absence from her room at that unusual hour, and as one theory after another came up, he dismissed them all, save the one advanced by Lawrence, and even that presented possibilities worse, perhaps, than death itself.

The young man was busy with wilder speculations. He had formed a theory, and though without any decided proof that he was right, had built up many a hope and fear therefrom. There may have been a spice of romance in the composition of the young mechanic, but he certainly had shown good common sense thus far through life, whatever might be the complexion of his present fancies.

He felt certain that Rose had been abducted. Perhaps not with criminal intentions toward the maiden, though upon that point he could not speak with certainty. Of course, if such were the fact, it had been done in order that the contemplated marriage might not take place.

Building upon this hypothesis, he thought there was no doubt but that the crime could be traced to Jerry Buffin, though that individual was absent from the place, and had been away a week, professedly upon a visit to the settlements. Certainly, a threat to that effect had been made long before, but Lawrence had never felt that it would be fulfilled in such a brutal manner. He had looked for a vigorous rivalry—nothing more. Now he felt that Jerry intended all he had said.

With the earliest dawn he was astir, and all his energies bent upon the task he had assumed. To unravel the great mystery was now his entire aim.

Buffin had not returned. This he learned

at once, and there his success ceased. All beyond that remained clothed in obscurity.

Night came. Lawrence sought his room with a gloomy feeling. Despite all his hopes to the contrary, the idea would press home upon his brain that Rose had perished in the flames. If this thought had not the terror in it which accompanied that of her being in the power of a rascal like Buffin, it still shut out all possibilities. If life remained, there would still be gleams of hope.

The shades of evening had settled over the village, and Lawrence sat with Maurice, talking in low tones of their hopes and fears.

Suddenly there came a quick rap at the door. What could it mean? The inhabitants of that place were not accustomed to use such ceremony upon entering a neighbor's dwelling. Could there be something of hope? Some tidings from the missing one? Lawrence sprung to open the door.

Upon reaching it, he was surprised to find no one there. Thinking it might be a ruse, he passed quite around the building, looking for some mischievous boy, but finding no one there. He was about re-entering the dwelling, when he observed something white lying in the doorway. He picked it up, and found it to be a piece of paper, folded and somewhat crumpled. Such things being rare in that section, he went to the fireplace to examine it. What was his surprise to find penciled upon it, in a delicate hand, which he knew very well,

"MR MAURICE JONSON."

"Glory, glory!" he exclaimed, springing from the floor with transport. "Here is news! 'Tis her own handwriting, as I live. And 'tis directed to you, Mr. Jonson. Here, quick! let me know what she says."

Maurice took the paper. Upon unfolding it, he saw that it was composed of two leaves torn from what he recognized as a diary belonging to Rose. With trembling fingers he opened them. Upon the innermost were two or three lines, written in pencil, and unmistakably the handwriting of the missing one. Bending close to the flickering fire, he read without difficulty:

"DEAR UNCLE:—I am alive and well. Do not seek to know more at present, as it will be useless."

"Rose."

With a groan Maurice dropped the paper, then rose and extended it to the young man, saying as he did so:

"My God! This from her!"

A moment later, he added:

"Poor Rose! I have done something to cause her to leave me in this way, and then write such cold, brief words! What is it?"

"I think you mistake, sir," said Lawrence, after having read the whole note carefully. "It is certainly her writing; but it is written at the dictation of another standing at her elbow. Do you not see that such must be the case?"

Mr. Jonson took the sheet, and read it carefully a second time. He seemed impressed with the opinion of his companion, and slowly remarked:

"Perhaps you are right, but it only adds to the mystery. We know that she lives, but noth-

ing more. And besides that, she requests us to learn nothing more."

"Evidently she is allowed this privilege only upon the condition that that be added. Thus he hopes to keep us from making any efforts toward finding her till he accomplishes whatever he may have in view."

"In any case we shall accomplish nothing if we disregard the injunction. Perhaps it may be as well to let—"

He paused, evidently at a loss in what words to end the sentence which he had commenced. Lawrence did not hesitate, but sprung to his feet, saying:

"That request is addressed to you, and, of course, you will heed it or not, as you may think best. To me there is no such restraint, and I shall not rest while it is in my power to make any movement toward discovering and bringing her back!"

"But you have no clew."

"Never mind; I must find a clew. That will be the first part of the task. When that is done, all the rest will be easy enough."

"Perhaps not so easy as you think. But I shall be dissuaded from an attempt by that request. If I knew it to come from Rose alone, I should think more seriously of acting her pleasure."

For some moments longer they conversed, and then Lawrence left the house, first taking along his rifle, and a heavy knife. These he took merely as a precaution, since he apprehended no use for them. A thought had entered his brain, and the young man wished to ponder it alone with himself. It might give him light, if well reasoned upon.

Walking rapidly away from the house, and up the mountain, he paused in a lone spot, and seating himself where no outward influences could disturb, he began to reflect and reason.

He had come thither for no particular purpose, but it seemed that some destiny was overruling his movements. He had scarcely been seated five minutes, when sounds reached his ears as though some person was stealing up toward him from a distance below. Bending carefully in the direction whence the sounds came, he listened. There was no mistake. Some person was advancing, almost directly toward him, and at a rather rapid pace. Possibly it might be some one looking for him, but far more likely it was a person whose movements he would like to watch.

Moving behind a tree, using great care that he made no rustling of the leaves, Lawrence peeped forth, endeavoring to catch the first possible glimpse of the nocturnal wanderer. There was a young moon, whose rays did not penetrate the wood very extensively. Yet its beams neutralized the darkness to such an extent that the young man soon discerned the approaching figure.

There was a short suspense, and then Lawrence grasped his rifle, while his burning gaze was fixed upon the new-comer with an intensity which seemed to defy darkness itself. He had recognized the man whom, of all others, he most suspected, Jerry Buffin! The time, place, and manner of his presence were proofs to young Estey of his guilt, quite as strong as he could

desire. No wonder, then, that he feared lest he should change his course and escape in the darkness.

But no. He came straight on, and in a few moments was within two yards of the place where Estey was crouching.

Suddenly there came the sharp click of a rifle-lock; the young man sprung to his feet, and placing the muzzle of his rifle within six inches of Jerry's head, he commanded:

"Stop, or I'll blow your brains out!"

The person addressed was evidently much startled, as well he might be, but in a moment had recovered himself so as to say, with tolerable indifference:

"Not a very civil way of asking a favor, Law my boy. Blowed if you didn't skeer me at fu'st!"

There was a sort of recklessness in the fellow's manner, and he attempted to pass on, despite the threatening attitude of Lawrence. But that personage had too much at stake to allow of any such proceeding. Stepping back a pace, he placed the muzzle of his gun within a foot of Jerry's heart, saying:

"Stop where you are. I want satisfaction of you, and now is the time when I must have it!"

"What the Old Scratch is the matter?" demanded Jerry, as he stopped, and regarded his interlocutor with something akin to astonishment. "Hope I hain't hurt your feelin's in no way?"

"You know very well what you have done, and now I want you to tell the whole truth, or by the great Eternal, I will make it worse for you. I have satisfied myself that you are the guilty one, and now I want to know where you have taken her."

"You joke well," said Jerry, a little uneasy in manner, "but I don't see the point of it. You know I have been away from here a week, and don't know what you are drivin' at."

There was something far different from what Lawrence had expected in the manner of Buffin, and he scarcely knew how to regard him. But certain that guilt would lead to its own detection, he quietly asked:

"Where were you night before last?"

"Somewhere in Stephentown; I don't know as it concerns you just *where* I was."

"That may be; I do not know *where* you were at the time; but this I do know; you were engaged in the abduction of Rose that night, and it was through your instrumentality that her uncle's house was burned!"

"What! Rose Jonson? Jonson's house burned!"

"You know very well. Now tell me where she is, for I am not disposed to dally long with you."

"And you charge me with taking her away? Lawrence Estey, you do me wrong. True, I wanted to marry the gal myself; but if I couldn't, I should let it go. You think 'twar me, acause I sorter talked that way, but 'twouldn't been me, if I hadn't. I'm allus goin' on that kind of nonsense."

"Do you dare to deny it? Tell me instantly where she is, or I'll blow you through. She shall at least be freed from your hateful presence!"

"Lawrence, I cannot tell you that, but what I do know I will tell you. Put your gun aside, for you're excited, and it might not be safe."

There was an appearance of truthful earnestness in the speaker's manner, and Lawrence turned aside his weapon, still intending to keep a close watch of every movement of his adversary.

"You see," said the latter, speaking slowly, and gradually advancing, with his eyes upon the ground, "I was in Stephentown three or four days ago, and one night, just after dusk, I was out with another feller. We was goin' by an old out-of-the-way shed, and we learn some other fellers talkin', kinder to themselves. So we partly stopped, to hear what they might be talkin' about. Says one of 'em—"

What the imaginary person might or might not have said, does not appear. At that moment Jerry had gained the distance desired, and with a quick movement he struck Estey. There was a hidden weapon clinched in his hand, and the young man dropped to the earth as though he had been shot. There was a convulsive quiver in his limbs, and the rifle fell from his nerveless grasp, though without exploding.

Jerry stood and gazed upon his victim for some moments, and then muttered:

"Fool! He's disposed of for the present. Now I'll tend to business."

Thus speaking he turned upon his heel, and dashed rapidly away toward the settlement.

CHAPTER IV.

A MIDNIGHT ERRAND.

It was the night which saw Maurice Jonson's house reduced to a mass of ruins, and which opened the eyes of the inhabitants to the commencement of a wildly strange drama, in which they were destined to take part.

Quietly stealing around to the rear of Jonson's residence, near the witching hour which divides the days, might have been seen two men. They were very guarded in their movements, taking care to make no noise, and very fearful it seemed from their manner, lest some one should be apprised of their presence. There was little danger of any such chance, however. All the honest persons in the place were buried in slumber, and there was very little light, so that unless some one was especially watching for them, there would be no probability of their being noticed.

Keeping the shade of other buildings as much as possible, and using all manner of caution, the twain at length stopped close in the rear of Jonson's house, and beneath one of the chamber windows.

"This is the winder," said the tallest of the twain, pointing upward. "Just keep easy till I git the ladder. I know where there's one. See if your lantern is all right."

He moved away in the direction of a shed, at a little distance, and while he was gone the other produced from beneath his garment—it could scarcely be called coat or frock—a miniature dark-lantern. Opening the slide a very trifle, he assured himself that it was burning brightly, then replacing it, he awaited the return of his companion.

He had not long to wait, for presently Jerry made his appearance, bearing a short ladder, which he quietly placed beneath the window. Then he rejoined his companion again.

"Now for the cloths," he whispered, in ex-

ultation, "and then we'll do this little job in style. Ain't things working lovely?"

"Allus work well, gi'n ye know how to take 'em," responded his companion. "But keep your observashins till the proper time. Thar's work on hand now."

Each of the plotters then produced a mask of red cloth which they placed upon their faces, thus effecting a complete disguise so long as it remained.

This being done, a few whispered consultations followed, and then Jerry began to ascend. The other remained below, holding the ladder, that no sounds might betray their movements. Some time was then consumed in opening the window noiselessly.

Ordinarily this would have been a very difficult, if not impossible task, as the window was upon hinges, and held in its place by a button. But very lately one of the lights near the button had been shivered, and through this the burglar introduced his hand, and succeeded in unfastening the sash. Then throwing it open he stepped inside, and crouched carefully in a corner till his companion came. The latter followed cautiously.

When both were in a position for work, a single ray of light was flashed about the apartment. It revealed the couch, with its fair occupant, as well as the general disposition of the room. The unconscious maiden reposed in all the freedom of happy innocence, one arm resting over the clothing, while her head was partially encircled by the other.

"That's enough," whispered Jerry. "Git yer holler-hearted persuaders ready, and I'll see to the mouth-stopping part of the arrangement."

Without any noise to disturb the sleeper, the twain approached and stood beside the couch. A ray of light was turned upon the victim, so that none of the operations should fail. Jerry stood pressing a gag to her mouth, while the assistant held a pistol presented to her head.

The pressing of the cruel wood against her mouth awakened the maiden. With a startled expression she attempted to rise in bed, but quickly found herself pressed back, while the gag was slipped into her mouth and secured.

"Now don't make any noise," said the villain holding the pistol, seeing that she was sufficiently awake to comprehend him. "We ain't goin' tew hurt ye, if ye keep still; if ye don't yer life ain't wu'th an acorn!"

The poor girl was really too frightened to raise any alarm, even had she been at liberty to do so. But with that cold death-instrument looking at her in the face, and those hideous forms, which she could but see as shadows in the darkness, it is no wonder that her nervous system refused to bear the shock, and that she sunk into a temporary swoon.

"That's all right; she's fainted," said Jerry, as he raised the inanimate form. "Pick up her clothes, and go down, so as to hold the ladder for me."

The other did as he was directed, dropping his dark-lantern upon the unoccupied bed, that his movements might be unimpeded. Just when he had gathered up the last garment, a slight noise in the hall or some apartment near by, alarmed

the two intruders, and they beat a hasty retreat. The accomplice descended first, holding the ladder while his principal followed, bearing the lifeless form in his arms. In their haste the lantern had been forgotten.

"Away with the ladder, quick," said Jerry. "Stand it in that shed, in the further corner."

The servitor did as requested, while Jerry sped away with his burden. At a little distance he was joined by the other, when it became evident that no alarm had been created.

"Faith, but I've left the lightnin'-bug in bed in place of the gal," said the smaller, pausing and looking back. "Shall I go back for it?"

"No, never mind it. We've made a pretty good bargain, and we'll let it go as it is."

"But it'll set them all afire in there."

"So much the better. Then they'll think the gal was burnt up, and we never shall be troubled in the matter."

"I suppose it is all right, since ye say 'tis," was the rejoinder, and with that remark the party continued to toil up the mountain-side.

Upon discovering that his victim was unconscious, Jerry had been humane enough to remove the gag, and when the distance of a mile had been gained, the maiden began to show signs of returning consciousness.

Feeling that he was safe from any immediate pursuit, Jerry placed her carefully upon the dry earth, and watched her return to reason. It was some time before she could speak, but no sooner did the power return than she demanded, fixing an indignant glance upon her abductor:

"Tell me what all this treatment means. Why am I dragged forth at night in this manner? Tell me at once, for I must return to my friends."

"Not now, my fair Rose; not now," said Jerry, in tones of mocking softness. "You must bear me company for a little time. But you are not going to be hurt, in any case, so don't fear. Here's your duds, so you can dress yourself as you see fit."

The poor maiden was sadly chilled already, and that reason, if no other, would have been sufficient inducement for her to dress at once. Though she did not prefer to perform her toilet in the presence of those two masked attendants—one of whom she knew, notwithstanding the disguise—there was no help for it, and in a short time she stood before them fully clothed.

It was still dark around—intensely dark there in the shades of the forest, but Rose knew who was the principal actor in her abduction. She knew very well that he had formerly desired to win her hand, and she knew equally well that he had threatened any successful rival with vengeance; but how this proceeding was to accomplish it, she was quite uncertain.

"Now tell me what this means, and what you intend doing with me?" she demanded, seeing that there was no probability of her being enlightened by their voluntary action.

"Never mind about that," said Jerry, half-mockingly. "Just take our word for what we have said, and let that rest you. When we get where we can talk these matters all over in safety, you shall know all you wish for."

There was something so unnatural in the appearance of the speaker, that, though positive of

his identity, Rose felt quite certain that it was all acting. Without stopping to reason upon the probable consequences of her action, the maiden suddenly darted past one of her abductors, and endeavored to flee in the direction of home.

But the attempt was quite useless. She was overtaken in a few moments, and arrested in her course with little show of gentleness.

"See here, miss," said the lesser villain; "we don't want tew hurt ye, but if ye go to tryin' any of them games we'll hev to dew it, 'cause we cannot bother with ye in that way. Now remember it; if ye start off again like that we shall be more likely tew send a bullet arter ye than to run very much ourselves!"

Half-provoked that she had not been more shrewd in her attempt, the maiden suffered her captor to lead her by the arm for a long distance up the mountain.

The hold was released at length, and the maiden walked between her two abductors out upon a ledge of rocks. The darkness still shut the world around from view, and though it seemed probable that she could at least see her late home, if favored by daylight, she had no idea as to the direction where it lay.

Before she could even look around, quick remarks from her companions drew her attention. They were gazing far down into the plain beneath, and the stranger broke silence by observing:

"See, the old shell is afire, true as ye live!"

"Let her burn," returned Jerry. "If they are slow about findin' it out, all our work'll be hid. There's that consolation."

Rose followed the glances cast by the speaker, and saw a bright flame bursting forth from some dwelling. There were dark forms about it, and much commotion, as she judged, though no sounds were audible at that distance.

"Where is that fire?" she asked, scarcely with a hope of getting any answer.

"Well, Miss Rose, we may just as well tell you," said Jerry, assuming an air of candor, "that the fire that you see comes from the very winder what we helped you out of!"

"Not from my uncle's house?"

"Yes it does. We didn't mean to do that, of course we didn't; but, you see, chummy here dropped his lantern, and forgot to pick it up, so the old frame tuk fire. But then it'll help us. If anybody thinks anything they'll know purty sart'in that you's burnt up there, and so won't trouble us any by lookin' for ye."

"Will you leave my friends to suppose that I perished in that manner?"

"Certain we will. It may save us a heap of trouble, and they may just as well think so now as not. Some time we'll show 'em how mistaken they were."

"But when the fire is extinguished they will see that I am not there, and will not fail to search me out."

"Yis, my dear gal; when they put the fire out all that may happen. But I kin tell you that the fire you're lookin' at never'll be stopped, long as there's anything for it to burn. And when it does go out nobody can tell whether you's thar or not. But we'll stop here awhile, and see how they make it."

Thus speaking, Jerry took a seat upon the rock, and when he had pulled Rose down, the smaller rascal also squatted down beside her. The maiden was satisfied now that it was really her house which was on fire, and she watched the progress of the flames with much interest. So absorbed was she in the matter, that even her own fate was almost forgotten for the time being.

In a very short time it became evident that no efforts were or could be made to stay the progress of the flames. In a few minutes they burst through the roof, and then the entire building quickly became enveloped. Rose turned away her head with a groan.

"Ye see what I told ye," said Jerry. "They all suppose you in your room, and how'll they ever know to the contrary! So, you see, we've got things all our own way, now."

"But what are you going to do with me? Why am I dragged away in this manner?" demanded the maiden.

"You mustn't be in a hurry to know," rejoined the villain. "When I git you where we're goin', where I want to git ye, and when I can talk with you, then you shall know all about it. But jest at this present time I don't think best to go into any explanations, 'cause we hain't the time to spare."

"You can at least tell me *where* you are going," pursued Rose, who would allow no opportunity for gathering information to pass.

"Jest so oneasy all the while," returned Jerry. "It won't do ye any good to ask so many questions. I've been over these mountains round enough to find out a thing or two that everybody doesn't know. And now it begins to stand me in good use."

The party continued to watch the burning building until a portion of the roof had plainly fallen in, and then the men arose to their feet.

"Come, 'it's time we were trampin'," said Jerry. "Take a good-by look of the old house, if yer want to, 'cause it's noways likely you'll see it again."

The maiden turned away, dashing a tear from her eye as she did so. There were a host of loved, pleasant associations clustering about that home, and it seemed like tearing some favorite image from the shrine of her heart, to see it thus destroyed.

It was not alone for her own future she was grieved and anxious; what would those from whom she was thus rudely forced, think or feel? Would they suppose her dead? Perchance that were better than that they should know the truth of the matter.

Filled with bitter thoughts and foreboding, she trod wearily on through the primitive forest. Where she went she could not determine, even by the aid of the stars. True, she tried to keep her reckoning, but a few quick turns would confuse her and soon all became uncertainty.

As the first faint glows of coming morning began to light up the east, the party came to a halt. For a little time they had been descending, and now stopped before a broad expanse of water. It lay there black and gloomy in the darkness, as Rose fancied, a reflection of her own heart.

CHAPTER V.

A PLAN UNFOLDED.

"WHERE is the boat?" asked the smaller of the two rascals, as he looked here and there for it, with no success. "Has some blackguard stole it?"

"Look off that way," suggested Jerry.

The other did as requested, and after a long absence the sound of dipping paddles reached the ears of Biffin as his unwilling companion. At the same time a moving object appeared upon the water, some distance to the left.

"Pat!" Jerry softly called.

"Tipperary foriver!" responded a voice from the boat.

He was soon on the spot, and when the boat was backed up leaped ashore.

"Will ye rest awhile, and wait for daylight?" he asked.

"No," returned Jerry. "It is generally darkest in the night. We'll git as near the nest as we can, and then it will be light enough for all purposes, most likely."

"Then in with you."

Jerry assisted Rose into the boat, and then followed. The other, who had been addressed as "Pat," shoved off the little craft, springing in with a readiness which denoted some acquaintance with life upon the water.

Indeed, we may as well say in this place that the individual was a roving, reckless character, from one of the nearest settlements, whom Biffin had engaged to assist him in the task on hand. His name was Patrick Smithers, universally contracted into "Pat," and his veins were filled with Irish blood, though being born and educated in America he showed little evidence of his Celtic origin.

As Rose saw the dark expanse of water before her, she knew very well her whereabouts. Often had she heard mention made of quite an extensive lake, situated among the mountains, and which was usually spoken of in connection with fishing parties, as its waters were said to abound with the finny tribes.

Beyond the bare fact of its existence she knew very little concerning the lake; not having visited it, and not feeling any great interest in regard to it.

The two men pulled steadily until the full dawn had come, and even then they had not reached the point toward which they were steering. The scenery was especially grand and beautiful, shut in as it was by walls of mountain upon all sides. Here and there the slopes ascended from the water's edge in regular and pleasant gradations; at other points the mountain rose bold and towering from the very bosom of the water. Still other places were shut in by high walls of massive rock, rising in grim grandeur like the impregnable fastness of some stronghold.

Toward such a spot, where the rock was roughest and raggedest, the course of the boat was laid. The unwilling occupant scanned the place as closely as possible, and from its appearance and the conversation of the men, meager as it was, she could but gather the idea that they had here some hidden retreat, to which she was being conveyed.

This impression was strengthened by their

movements upon nearing the shore. Instead of looking for a place to land, they ran the boat into a narrow gorge of the rocks, where huge boulders had been piled in strange shapes, at some time, and by some agency. Slackening their speed, the boat was quickly turned, and pulled into a large crevice, arched above by a crowning stone, which lay so near the surface of the water that those within the boat were obliged to stoop in order to make the passage.

All was intensely dark within, and for some time all that Rose gathered in respect to their situation, was from hearing and feeling. She was aware that the boat struck a sandy bottom soon, when she was assisted from it, and found herself upon a firm substance, with plenty of room to stand upright.

"Our house ain't so fancy, or so well lighted as I have seen," laughed Jerry, as he led the maiden along. "But then, it is retired, and purty safe, all things considered. You will like it, arter ye git a little used to it."

They proceeded, what seemed to Rose a considerable distance, now stooping, now walking erect, and anon crawling, till at length Jerry said:

"Turn around and take a seat, my gal. You're at hum now. Pat, give us some light on the subject."

The assistant did as requested, and soon a pine knot shed light over the scene.

It may be surmised that Rose awaited this moment with no little anxiety. Where was she, and what were her surroundings?

Impatient as she was, it was some moments before she could gather any idea of her situation. That she was standing upon rock, and surrounded by walls of the same, she could gather at the first glance. And that was about all.

Very soon she became accustomed to the flaring light of the torch, and then the real nature of her prison began to creep out. She was in a natural cavern, formed by the piling together of great, irregular masses of rock. In places the height was more than twenty feet, and again, the heavy rocks came down within reach of the hand. Of the same general character were the sides, and though the floor was smoother, it would require great care to move far in the darkness natural to the place. The cavern had none of the beautiful formations and weird appearance the maiden had expected those of such large proportions to possess. On the contrary, some parts were wet and dripping, while the whole cave was dark and dismal, without a redeeming feature.

One thing surprised her. From the place where she stood the whole outline of the apartment was revealed, yet nothing in the shape of an opening was to be seen. She certainly could not be far from the place, for she had a distinct recollection of crawling through a low passage, and immediately after that she had paused. But there was no place visible through which a cat could readily pass, and content that the matter should rest where it was, she turned her attention into other channels.

"Now, Miss Rose, here we be," said Jerry, in tones of relief and satisfaction. "We'll stop here for a while, at any rate, and to show ye

that I mean what I say, just come this way, and see how well I've fixed up for you."

He led the way around the corner of a large projecting rock not far distant, and upon following him, the maiden found a nook, which seemed to have been especially prepared for her benefit. Next the rock was a pile of leaves, covered with a blanket, and arranged as nearly in the form of a couch as possible. Not far away was a pitcher of water and some cold food. There were also evidences of a fire having been built near by, and in the rock above was a cleft, through which the smoke might have escaped.

Rose had merely noticed these indications, when Jerry turned toward her, with the remark:

"You see, Miss Rose, that we've made this as nice for ye as we could. True 'tain't like a good house, and plenty of nice things, but then, you'll go back home by-and-by, and then all will be as good as now. There's many a gal in the world what would be glad of a wuss place than this."

"But why am I brought here?" asked the poor maiden. "At least tell me that, and then I shall be inclined to think you are candid with me."

"That is just what I am going to dew. But first of all, just take a seat and rest yourself. I'll be here in a few minutes, and then we'll talk over the whole matter."

As she sunk upon the couch of leaves, he turned away, leaving her alone in her bewilderment and wonder. Burying her head between her hands, Rose sat for a long time, busied with sad and painful thoughts. Not alone for herself, did she feel thus, but she reflected upon the uncertainty of her fate to her friends; and fancy brought up in vivid colors the sorrow and anguish which would be theirs. Did they mourn for her as dead; or were they aware that she had been stolen from them?

Filled with such thoughts, time passed almost unheeded. She started up at length, surprised to find herself alone. She had certainly expected Jerry to return long before this, and the absence of that individual, with the utter silence of that subterranean chasm, filled her with an unspoken dread.

Standing up, she looking around. The pine knot still burned, where it had been stuck in a crevice of the rock, but no one was within sight. Thinking those who had brought her there might be near, she stepped from behind the spur of rock, and looked about. Very plainly she was alone.

Once aware of that fact, she remembered her inability to discover the place of entrance, and felt that now was a good time to pursue her investigations. She could not tell exactly the quarter in which the supposed opening ought to exist, and resolved to make a circuit of the rock till she found it.

Starting from where she was standing, Rose passed slowly along, examining each junction and crevice as she went, as well as the light of the single torch would allow. It was not an easy task to scramble over those rough rocks, wet and slippery as they were, to crawl up into dark shelves, only to find the impossibility of proceeding further, down again into the lower

recesses, where nothing but mud and rattle-snakes were to be looked for.

Still she persevered, till half the circuit had been made, with toil and scrambling enough to have compassed it many times over, it seemed to the weary one. But here a ray of light came to renew her hopes, and she scrambled up a sharp acclivity, only to find her hopes dashed. Yet she was not wholly mocked. There was an aperture at which she could thrust out her arm, and which commanded a view of the lake. There was a current of cool, pure air, likewise, which invigorated her frame, giving strength for future trials.

After looking forth for a time upon the freedom she had lost, and breathing an unspoken prayer for Divine aid, she started on again. The balance of the way was not so difficult, and, before long, she arrived safely at the place from which she had set forth. But where was the object of her mission? Certainly, she had no signs of any communication with the outer world, and yet, but a short time before she had followed the lead of her abductor full to the place where she was now standing? What did it mean? Was she the victim of a fearful nightmare? Or had she but dreamed these things?

Efforts made to awaken herself, showed conclusively that she was not asleep. And almost at the same moment she beheld the form of Jerry, standing near her. She started perceptibly, but he came forward with an easy assurance. She would have asked him something in regard to the mystery which was puzzling her so much, but before she could do so, he motioned her to a seat, saying:

"Now we'll talk over that matter."

Rose sunk back upon the pile of leaves, and bent toward the speaker, in her eagerness to hear what he should say. The cloth mask was removed, and all disguise upon his part seemed at an end.

"You know I was rather hangin' round your house, a year ago," he began. "And of course, ye know, I wa'n't thar for nothin'. I'd made up my mind to marry you, and that's what brought me around the house so much."

Here he paused for a moment, as if recalling some event, and then he went on:

"Well, I fancied you war rayther pleasanter tew me than you war tew other fellers, and so I felt purty nice over it. But after a while that young chap from the States came out, and away went all my fun. I never liked the feller, though he didn't hurt me anv. But I swore he never'd marry you, and he sha'n't!"

There was a look of determination in the face of the speaker, which showed that he meant all that his words conveyed. After noticing their effect upon the maiden, for a few moments, he pursued:

"I've taken pains to get you away jest in the nick of time. You can go back when ye go as my wife, and never before! I'm pesky sorry about burnin' up yer uncle's house, but it can't be helped, and it makes things all right for me. They think you are there, and if you never was hearn from ag'in, 'twouldn't be anything out of the ordinary run. They expect it. 'Course they'll be mighty well pleased to see ye, when they never expected anything of the

kind. You see, I've put my hand in, and I can't back out now, if I ever want to. You see just how things stand, and when you get ready to say you'll go back as my wife, and just say nothin' about last night, in any shape or fashion, why, you can go. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll allus use you well, and I'll break off all the bad habits I've got aboard now. I will, true as gospel. I'll join the church, or anything else you've a mind to say. Only, one thing is sart'in. You must be my wife, afore you can see any of yer friends, no matter if it takes ye years ter make up yer mind."

"You do not mean anything so dreadful as that," the maiden gasped, when he had ceased speaking. "You will surely have some mercy!"

She would have said more, but she realized how completely she was in the power of the plucker, and thought best to disguise her disgust for the present.

"I've told ye what I mean. I've swore ye never should be the wife of Lawrence Estey, and I must make my word good. It's too late to back out now."

He arose and paced back and forth for a short time, when he stopped again before the maiden.

"Think it over," he said. "Remember that I mean every word I've said, and you'll see I don't make ye a bad offer. Take all the time you want to think of it. In the while you'll find this quite a comfortable place to stay."

With a smile upon his features, which spoke of a satisfied state of mind, the abductor moved away from the place, and when Rose looked up again she was alone in the cavern.

CHAPTER VI.

GROWING IN CRIME.

"So this is the fate before me," mused Rose. "I suspected something of the kind. Oh, why are evil passions allowed to triumph thus? But I have heard said that only a diamond will cut a diamond. Perhaps I can plot as deeply as Jerry. If possible, I will not allow him to know how deep is the disgust I feel toward him. Probably I shall be safe so long as I can lead him to think that I may yet accept his proposal."

Reflecting in this manner, the maiden resolved to delay the crisis as long as possible, trusting that some favoring chance would open in her behalf. If she could but blind him as to her real intentions, so as to escape, it mattered little if she perished in a wilderness, so that she broke the snare in which she now found herself.

It was some time before Jerry appeared in the cavern again. When he did, it was not till he stood very near to her that the maiden was aware of his presence. He was accompanied by Pat Smthers, and the twain helped themselves to a portion of the cold food with which the cavern was well-stocked. After eating their fill Pat lighted his pipe, and stood in a retired corner, while Jerry stood near Rose.

"How shall I know that you are sincere in what you said?" the latter asked. "What evidence will you show that I am not being entirely deceived?"

"What'll satisfy ye?" was the abrupt demand. "Just name over, and anything that's reasonable shall be done, jest to satisfy you."

"Will you take some means of letting my uncle know that I am still with the living?"

"Can't do it."

"Why not?"

"I would be too dangerous."

"No danger could attend it; just allow me to write a word, saying that I still live, and you can easily place it where he will obtain it, with no risk to yourself. It will certainly be much more humane than allowing him to mourn for me as he is now doing."

"But the mountains will swarm with hunters all anxious to find you and get a great reward."

"Nothing of the kind. I will request my uncle to make no efforts to find me."

Bullin hesitated. For a while he attempted to dissuade the maiden, but she was earnest, and as it seemed to show an inclination upon her part to yield, he finally consented to follow her suggestion; but it was not till near night of the following day that he started forth to deliver the document. Up to that time Rose had maintained her resolute bearing, and when she saw him set forth it was with a strong hope that she might be able to effect her escape in some manner before his return.

The result of Jerry's mission we have seen, as also the encounter upon his return, in which he obtained an unmistakable advantage over Lawrence Estey.

Let us follow him as he turned and sped down the mountains, almost by the same way he had ascended.

"So," he muttered to himself, casting quick glances into the darkness upon either hand, for he could see little besides. "so Lawrence has got his suspicions raised, has he? Perhaps they are all out lookin' fer me, on account of his foolish whim. But, no, that can't be; all was still enough at the village, and I could have sworn that 'twas him come out to look after me. Most likely he read the gal's note, and concluded which way it come, and started off to look for somebody; that's what 'tis. I'm glad I didn't quite kill the poor fool, though what I've done will be the means of stirring up the whole village. Let 'em come; as I told the gal, I've put my hand to it, and now it must go through. If I can't stay on the mountain in safety, why I'll find a place where we can stay. This world ain't all filled up yet, not by a great sight."

While muttering this, in disjointed sentences, the speaker had so nearly reached the village that he was forced to proceed with more than former caution through fear of meeting some one who might be abroad. His perfect acquaintance with the place, however, enabled him to skulk along in such a manner that none would have suspected him unless upon the lookout for that very purpose.

His aim seemed to be the large barn which belonged to Maurice Jonson, and which had escaped the conflagration when his house was destroyed. One end of the building was some distance above the ground, and passing under it he found a short ladder leading to a trap-door in the floor above. This he ascended, and carefully raised the trap till he was able to pass through.

This he did not do until satisfied that no one was in the building. Leaving the trap open he

proceeded to reconnoiter. Four horses were standing in their stalls, and to these he gave a long scrutiny. It was very dark there, and he was some time in determining what he wished to know. Satisfied at length, he began running his hand over the rack where he knew the accouterments to be usually hung. There were harnesses and bridles in plenty. Of the latter he selected two, which were carefully deposited beside the trap; then the search was continued.

At length he found the object desired. Three saddles were ranged upon the floor near at hand, and in a moment he had selected two of them, one a woman's saddle. Taking these and the bridle already secured, he managed to descend the ladder, and made his way with them to a point distant some one-fourth of a mile from the village. Here he paused, and secreting them in a small grove he looked carefully about and then cautiously returned to the place he had left.

"Folks ain't all asleep yet," he mused, seeing a few lights still burning. "I may as well wait and if that young upstart comes back I can stop him easier tnan I can get the horses away now."

He placed himself beside the path which he felt certain Lawrence would take in returning to the village, and he waited for nearly an hour. Feeling that it would be safe for him to attempt the removal of the horses at the end of that time, he crept away and gained the barn.

Opening the door through which he must lead them forth, he next proceeded to spread a quantity of hay upon the floor over which they must pass, so that no heavy footfall should attract attention. This done, he entered the nearest stall and grasped the halter which held the animal.

But even as he did so there came a sound from without which caused him to spring quickly over the rail in front, and lower himself through the trap without a moment's delay.

"Hillo; what's this? How comes this door open?" asked a voice not far away. It was the voice of Jonson himself.

"Thieves, perhaps," suggested a second voice, which Jerry did not recognize, nor did he wish to.

"No, I think not," was the reply. "Lawrence is out somewhere, and I guess he is in here."

Jerry was quite satisfied with this supposition, and glided away into the outer world before any suspicion of his presence was aroused.

"Lawrence, are you here?" Mr. Jonson called, thrusting his face in at the door.

Of course there was no response, and the call was repeated with like results.

Both the men entered and began to look around; Jonson very quickly espied the open trap.

"What in the world could he be thinking of?" was the first exclamation. "Then, recollecting that the young man might be below, he called his name several times, but without result.

"The horses are all here," said the second party, whose suspicions had been aroused, and who had at once hastened to assure himself of the fact. "So, if anybody has been here we came at the right time."

"No, no; I see how it is," returned Jonson. "The poor fellow is suffering all manner of things on account of Rose, and has no mind for anything else. He has been here and forgot to shut the doors, he opened. That's the way it is."

They looked carefully about to assure themselves that no fatal accident had befallen the young man, and when satisfied in that respect they shut the doors and returned to the house.

Meanwhile the rough rascal who had been so nearly detected was chuckling over his easy escape. Having gained a safe distance from the barn, he paused and communed with himself.

"It's plain they'll be on the lookout to-night, so I can't do anything there. But then, as fortin' 'll hev it, Brownin's pasture ain't desput fur off. I'll go thar and git my hosses; 'cause hosses I must hev."

He started off, muttering as he went:

"Plague on the gal; why didn't I let her alone? But then, I've got started, and gone too fur tew turn back, so I may as well proceed."

The young man's conscience was not utterly dead, as yet. Its voice would be heard. But instead of hearkening to it, Jerry smothered it, justifying his conduct to himself by asserting that it was now too late to retract.

Wending his way to the pasture in question, Jerry was but a few minutes in finding the horses, nor was it long until he had selected the two he intended taking away.

Within fifteen minutes of the time when he left Jonson's barn, he was mounted upon one animal and leading another up the side of the mountain.

He did not, however, take the route which he had pursued when the encounter between himself and Lawrence Estey took place. Really, that was an impracticable way for horses, and not only that, but he had no wish to find himself again confronted by that cold rifle-muzzle. He therefore took a route leading far away to the right, and after riding in that direction long enough, turned and began making toward the lake.

After a long ride through the stunted forest which abounded in that direction, he reached the margin of the sheet, and worked his way as near as practicable to the cavern where his confederate and captive had been left. Dismounting, he secured the animals, and jumping into the boat, paddled into the mouth of the dark opening shortly before the coming of dawn.

Rose had not been idle during Jerry's absence. She had gathered the fact that Pat was of Irish descent, and she knew very well that the race was noted for impulse and geniality. Feeling that it would be possible for her to escape only through the instrumentality of some friend, she had long before conceived the idea of making an appeal to his heart. She could only meet refusal, and it was possible she might touch the better side of his nature.

It was soon after the departure of Jerry that she found an opportunity of speaking with Pat. He had entered the cavern, and taken a seat near the torch, from which his short pipe had been lighted. Although his face bore marks of

a low and coarse nature, it seemed to Rose that there might still be something of goodness left beneath all the visible coarseness. For some time she was uncertain in what manner to approach him, but finally decided to be as straightforward as possible. Walking over to where the Irishman sat, enjoying his pipe, she dropped upon her knees, and addressed him without faltering.

"My friend," she said, "I will pay you well to take me back to my friends; or even let me go out and make the attempt myself. I must go! It is worse than death to stay here with that ungracious wretch, Jerry. You cannot have the heart to keep me here against my will."

"So long as Jerry paid me to do a job for him, it wouldn't be gentlemanly in me to back out and not half do it. I never goes back on an employer that way."

"But you have done his work, and now why not work for me? My uncle is well able to pay you, and he certainly will do it, and far more liberally than Jerry can do."

"There may be some sense in that, madam; but when a man's out of hot water he's wise to keep out, as they say. I'd rather have a little money from Jerry than a good deal of rope from your friend."

"You need fear nothing. The very fact of your repentance would be your greatest safeguard. If you were detected and overtaken, it is more than probable that you would suffer for it. But if you will help me to return, I will not only guarantee that you shall be safe in person, but that you shall be well rewarded. Now, what do you say?"

Pat was not disposed to commit himself. He equivocated and raised many bugbears; but the maiden was determined not to give up while there was any prospect of success, and she continued to urge the matter until Pat finally partially promised that he would aid her when he was able to do so without risking the vengeance of Buflin, whom he seemed to fear.

Feeling that nothing more could be done till such time as Pat had indicated, if, indeed, even then, she returned to her nook, and throwing herself upon the leafy couch, tried to bury her forebodings of fear in slumber.

She was successful to the degree that she fell into a broken sleep, from which she did not fully awaken until startled by the consciousness of some one bending over her. She opened her eyes to the realization of the fact that the man she feared so much had returned, and was peering into her face. At the moment she felt the strong fumes of liquor, and knew that he had been drinking either during his absence or since his return.

"Come, my honey," he said, half-insolently, "I've gi'n 'em your letter, an' now we'll off to the magistrate's. Come, I've got a hoss and yer own saddle for ye, and we'll jest have a gay ride this mornin'! 'Twill do ye good; I want yer cheeks to look redder when we're brought up before the parson!"

"Where are you going to take me now?" she asked, filled with fear, though not unmixed with hope.

"Why, I reckon we'll find one in Stephen-

town; if not, why we'll go further. Come, are ye ready?"

"Certainly," said the maiden.

She followed him through the narrow passage which had been concealed from her observation at first by a flat stone skillfully fitted, and into the boat, by which means they reached the place where the horses were standing. She felt a stronger hope now, since she had no doubt of being able to elude him and escape, if they should reach the vicinity of civilization. Besides, there was Pat's partial promise, and to all these she looked for a speedy deliverance.

Alas! she little knew the bitter experiences which she was going forth to meet.

CHAPTER VII.

A ROGUE'S PURPOSE.

PAT SMITHERS had accompanied the others in the boat, and was first to spring on shore. He assisted Rose from the boat, and at a word from his master, for we must regard Buflin in that light, assisted her upon the horse.

"Come here, Pat," said Jerry, when the task was done.

He was standing some feet away, beside the water. The confederate walked to his side, and a few sentences passed in tones so low that Rose did not hear their import.

"I want my pay," were the first words she heard, and they came from the mouth of Smithers.

"Wait till I see you again," said Jerry, in a plausible manner. "You shall have it, all right, when this thing is settled."

"But I want it now. You've got the money, and you know the agreement. If that's what you're after, I never 'll see you again. Come, fork over. I work for pay, and I mean to have it."

"You'll have it when I get ready to pay you," was the surly response.

"Then I'll work for them that'll be glad to pay me!" was the significant rejoinder.

"You will? So, you begin to threaten, do ye?"

"I work for pay, and the man that pays best is the best."

"I'll pay you! I'll pay you, you dog you!" snarled Jerry, giving way to a drunken rage. "Here, take this!"

He drew a pistol and took deliberate aim at the man before him. Smithers flourished a knife and sprung forward, but he was too late.

There came the report of the pistol, a heavy body fell into the water, and Jerry turned to mount the riderless horse, as calmly as if his hands had not been stained, for the first time, with the life-blood of a fellow mortal!

"You haven't killed him, have you?" demanded Rose, when she could command her voice sufficiently to speak. She was fearfully agitated, and trembled so that her words were scarcely intelligible.

"How do you know I hain't?" was the savage rejoinder. "What business is it of yourn, any way? Jest manage yer part of the affair, and I'll tend to mine."

He drew the bridle from her hand and started away, guiding his own horse and leading hers. The maiden was too thoroughly frightened to

ask any further questions, to resist, or scarcely to think. Once or twice she glanced back toward the place where the fatal affray had occurred, but the fiendish look bent upon her by Jerry caused her blood to run cold. Once she asked herself if it could be possible that he whom she had known so long, half-reckless as he had ever been, could have degenerated into such a fiend. There could be no mistake; it was he, and not only that, but she was in his power! There was no disguising the fact; and was it a wonder that she trembled for the future, despite her utmost efforts to maintain fortitude?

For a long distance the journey was made in silence. Which way they were going, whether north, south, east or west, Rose had no opportunity of knowing. Not only did their way lay through forest, where all vision was confined within narrow limits, but the morning was cloudy and no sun had as yet appeared, to reveal the points of the compass.

Of one thing she felt assured: they were rather riding around the mountains, and across and along the range, than taking any direct route toward civilization, to reach which they must cross extensive prairies. After what had occurred, was it any wonder that the maiden felt suspicious that all the fair pretenses of Jerry in regard to seeking a justice or parson was but a sham? Most certainly it was such, else why had not Pat Smithers accompanied him?

Finally she could bear the suspense no longer, and ventured to remark:

"This is not the way toward Stephentown, is it?"

"Course it ain't; who said it was?"

"Then where are we going?"

Her voice trembled.

"Oh, going tew some good place that'll answer all purposes as well as Stephentown, I reckon."

There was a savage triumph in the villain's manner which alarmed Rose. That she was not going toward any settlement was quite evident. Where then? Reason told her that it was further into the wilderness. Her heart sunk at the idea—alone in the far wilds with such a villain as Jerry Buffin! The very thought was horror personified.

Yet her courage did not utterly fail. She had been educated in a belief and an earnest practical faith in the omnipotence and omnipresence of the Supreme Ruler. That faith was now her only trust. If, as she had been taught, all was overruled for good, then she had nothing to fear. Still, her human nature shrunk from the ordeal. If a life of shame and misery were decreed for her, could she bear it?

Such were the speculations which filled her mind. Over and over she pondered the case, and still they rode on. Even to her mind the proofs that they were crossing the mountains and going westward had now become indisputable. Through valleys, up hills, and around mountains they went, slowly, to be sure, because rapid riding was utterly out of the question.

Rose had no means of computing time. It must certainly be noon, perhaps later than that. Jerry held his rifle resting across his saddle-bow, evidently upon the lookout for game.

That he had no food was certain, and the maiden almost felt the want of it.

They had not ridden far in this state of expectation, when a large black bear was discovered, some distance to the right of them. Jerry at once turned his horse in that direction, and Rose followed a little way behind.

The animal did not appear to fear the approaching party, but sat upon his haunches, quietly regarding their movements. Jerry fired at short range, and his bearship rolled upon the ground. The former then reloaded his rifle, sprung from his horse, and threw the bridle over a limb.

"Come, my gal," he said, "we'll have our dinner now. You must cook it. Jest as well to git yer hand in one time as another. I'll build a fire for ye and cut off the steak. But mind ye, don't try tew play any games on me, 'case it'll cost ye high if ye do."

He advanced to assist her to alight, but she had gained the ground already. After securing the horse, Jerry turned and cut away a portion of meat from the quivering carcass, and then proceeded to kindle a fire. This latter was an easy task, since materials were abundant, and in a few moments the ruddy flames were fast producing coals for the broiling.

"Here's all the tools ye want," said Jerry, handing his hunting-knife and a sharpened stick to the maiden. "Now see how ye'll do for a hunter's bride."

He laughed a hoarse laugh at this supposed witticism, while Rose took the articles he extended to her with a mechanical motion. How she longed to plunge the keen blade into his bosom. Only a consideration of the awfulness of the deed, with the dread certainty attending failure, caused her to refrain.

In a short time the savory meal was prepared. Certainly, the roast looked inviting, and Jerry did not hesitate to pronounce it excellent.

"Bless my eyes, Rosy, what a fine hunter's wife you'll make! Glad I concluded tew bring ye off here now. Jest the place. Do ever so much better'n ye would cooped up in a house, where ye never could half-breathe. Jest as lieves tell ye as not. Ye're going tew live this way the rest o' your life, only better, I hope. I'm goin' off toward the Injin country, maybe intew it, and settle down. You'll be my wife, ye know. If we git any chance tew git married, all right. If we don't, no matter. Who'll ever know the difference?"

"Ourselves and God!" said the maiden, through her horror at the revelation, which, indeed, was little more than she had expected.

Buffin seemed checked by her unexpected answer, and did not reply for a moment. Then he rallied, and in an indifferent tone responded:

"Won't make much odds about anybody so fur off as that, I reckon."

"He may be nearer than you think," said the maiden, earnestly.

"Wal, if He is let Him show Himself. We won't borry any trouble till He does."

Little more was said, as neither cared to prolong the conversation. Rose attempted to eat, for she felt that her nature required food, but the effort was very great. The bear meat was tough, almost resembling leather in consistency,

while the declaration which Jerry had made of his purpose had served to diminish his fear of food.

After he had eaten a full supply and cut away some portions of the meat for future use, Jerry began preparations for renewing his journey. Sad and broken-hearted, Rose resumed her saddle. No deception existed now. The dreadful fate to which she was traveling had been revealed to her, and her abductor rather gloated over her misery.

The journey was continued during the afternoon, and, as it seemed to the sufferer, till near sunset; though the day had been cloudy, without a ray of distinct sunlight. There was every appearance of a long and severe storm, but of this Rose scarcely thought. What matter was it to her if the elements should become disturbed? Was not her breast already a darker, gloomier world, than that around her?

But while riding onward with no apparent purpose of stopping, though it seemed to Rose that she should fall from her horse, Jerry finally pulled up with a quick exclamation.

"Hello! what's them? Injins, as sure's my name's Jerry!"

His gaze was directed to the left, and, upon looking that way, Rose saw something which added to her apprehension.

At the distance of some two or three hundred yards, a party of savages was gathered, twenty or thirty in number, arrayed in hunting-costume, and dispersed here and there through the forest, while their most numerous assembly was about a large fire which had just been built.

Rose had seen and knew enough of the tribes near to be certain that this was a peaceable party, and she knew that general friendliness existed between the whites and Indians at that time. Yet it was not with the calmest of feelings that she beheld the red-men. What connection they were to have with herself was yet to be seen.

Jerry remained a few moments regarding the camp, while half a dozen among the Indians were observing him with a curious air. They evidently felt anxious to know who was the lone "pale-face" journeying thus through the wilderness.

"Them yer fellers seem kinder sociably inclined," he muttered, after a pause. "Blow me if I don't think I'd better go out and scrape an acquaintance with 'em."

Acting upon the resolution, he turned his horse's head toward them, and Rose could but follow. The Indians seemed rather pleased at the prospect of a visit from the white man, and ranged themselves with a show of ceremony to receive him.

"You may as well get off and rest," Jerry said, after satisfying himself that the Indians were really friendly. "We'll stop here awhile, any way."

The maiden did not need a second bidding. Slipping from her horse, she resigned him to the care of an Indian brave, who seemed to covet the honor, and sunk upon the earth at the foot of a large tree.

A quantity of food was at once placed before her, but the maiden was too much exhausted to eat.

"No, I thank you," she said to the brave who brought it, "I am very much exhausted now. I will eat some by and by."

The Indian cast a pitying look upon her, and retired with the venison-steak. But, presently, he returned, bearing a gourd shell, filled with pure, cold water. Rose grasped it eagerly, for nothing could have been more acceptable than the cool beverage. She drank a full draught, feeling much revived afterward. The savage seemed delighted to find that he had administered to her comfort, and left, with a promise, in very broken English, to bring her some food in a very short time.

It was not long afterward that Jerry returned, and threw himself on the ground beside Rose.

"Heigho," he drawled out; "I'm tired. Wal, I suppose you be, too. But we'll stay here for a while and rest. These Injins have been out on a hunt, and are gittin' ready now to go home. We'll go along with 'em. They seem glad to have us, and make all sorts of promises to me to jine their tribe. Think I'll do it. They say we kin be married their way, and it'll be jest as good while we live with 'em. If we want to be married over when we go among folks ag'in, we kin. They'll stay here to-night, sart'in, and maybe part of to-morrer, so you'll have a chance of gittin' rested. Nice, ain't it?"

"Better than no rest, I suppose," said Rose, though scarcely aware *what* she said at the time. In fact this new purpose of Buffin's was revolting in its character. The prospect of a life spent among the wild Indians, under any circumstances, was bad enough; but, in this case, as the so-called wife of a villain and murderer, the thought became almost unbearable.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEAD ON THE TRAIL.

ALTHOUGH fate seemed against her, Rose was not yet utterly cast down. She had faith that, before reaching the Indian country, which must lie several days' journey away, she could form the acquaintance of some brave who would be induced to assist, or allow her an opportunity to escape. Failing in this, she would apply to the chief, who was well spoken of as an honorable Indian, and request to be returned to her people. Until the Indian lands were reached she felt quite safe, as Jerry would no doubt be scheming enough to respect her while with his new-found friends.

As the shades of evening descended, the Indians gathered about their fire, giving places of honor to their white friends. Pipes were smoked for a long time, speeches made, and traditions related upon the part of the Indians, till Rose was quite disgusted with the mixture of Indian and English which nobody could understand without a perfect knowledge of both languages.

Jerry, on his part, did not fail to make a favorable impression upon the hearts of his dusky companions. If his own account was to be received, there was no man among all the whites whom he had ever encountered, who equaled him in those qualities which were the especial delight of the savage. Not only was he a very remarkable personage, but all his superior powers should be bestowed upon the red-

men, without stint or price. He would teach the young braves all those arts which make the white man superior to the red, and if need should ever come that his adopted people must fight the pale-faces, he would assist them.

It was not till a late hour that the circle was dissolved. One by one the Indians smoked themselves into drowsiness, and rolled in their blankets, till finally a single guard was set to see that all was right about the camp. Then a general rolling-up followed.

When most of the Indians had disposed of themselves, Jerry approached Rose and said:

"Here is a blanket that I borrowed from one of the Injins for ye. Roll up anywhar yer a mind tew, and sleep all ye kin, so as to git rested. I declare I feel sorry to see ye lookin' so tired out."

"Then let me go back to my friends," said the suffering maiden. "Why will you drag me away in this cruel manner, when you know that it is killing those who have always used you well, as well as myself? Have you no pity?—no mercy?"

"No use o' yer goin' on so," was the unfeeling rejoinder. "It's too late to talk about them things. All ye kin dew now is make the best of it. I've gone too fur to back out now, as I've told ye, over and over ag'in."

"No, you have not. I will promise you—"

She would have said, "utter silence in regard to all that has passed;" but when she recollected that the man was a murderer, her heart refused utterance to the words.

"Don't trouble yourself tew make any promises. It ain't of any account. Jest lay still and git rested. Don't try any foolish plans of runnin' away, 'cause it won't amount to anything, and when we're settled down, if not afore, it'll cost ye a great deal more'n 'twill come to!"

There was a terrible menace implied in the tone of the threat more than the words which gave it expression. Rose shuddered, for she knew what dreadful passions swayed the reckless man, and turned away to seek the sleep she so much needed.

Jerry remained watching her for some time, and then threw himself upon the ground near the fire.

The maiden was so thoroughly exhausted that she did not at once sink to sleep, but remained in a waking state, thinking over the events of the day, and the circumstances which now surrounded her. Look at it as she would, it seemed very dark, and but for the faint hopes she had of exciting pity in the breast of some Indian, she would have felt that her situation was hopeless.

Pity from a savage! How slender the thread upon which to hang all of one's hopes! And yet that was all which intervened between herself and utter despair.

True, it was possible that she could leave the camp, and wander till the following day before they would be able to discover her. But that was of little use. She could obtain no horse, for it was to them that the attention of the Indian guard was mainly directed. She knew not in what direction to move, for she had little idea where her home lay. If she could escape the search which Jerry and probably the In-

dians, would be sure to institute, it was more probable that she would perish of hunger, exhaustion, or from the attacks of wild beasts, than that she would reach any place of safety.

Indeed, so small seemed the prospect of her success, that she determined to await further developments before adopting that as a last resort. Well aware that she needed sleep, and the restoring influence which it would bring, she tried to compose her mind, and shut out external things, so that the sleepy god would visit her.

She had almost succeeded in bringing on drowsiness, when she became conscious of a movement not far from her. Startled into a realization of her exposed condition, Rose looked quickly in the direction whence came the disturbance.

It was dark, but not so utterly so as the day had given promise of, since part of the clouds had broken away, and many a glittering star was out in the darkness above. Still objects at any distance were quite indistinguishable, and now that the fire had died away, she could only discern a few of the nearest sleepers.

But, close at hand was a heavy form, which had not been there before. It was but natural that her first thought should be of Jerry, and with a sinking heart she held her breath, awaiting the next moves.

Certainly that person (for she could distinguish the outlines of a human form), was gradually drawing nearer. She shrunk away, uncertain whether to cry out or wait for more light in regard to his intentions. She decided upon the latter course, and in a short time the strange object was so near that she could have touched it.

"Say—my gal!" came to her ears, in a low whisper, as the intruder paused.

Surely, those were not the tones of Jerry's voice! How hope sprung up at this realization! She had no enemy among people of her own color save him, and certainly the tones were those of a white man. Slightly inclining her head, to indicate that she heard him, Rose waited for further communications.

"Say, my gal, is this you?" came the second whisper, slightly stronger than before, yet not sufficiently so to reach the ears of any save the one addressed.

"Yes, it's me," she whispered, very carefully; "who are you?"

"Don' ye know Pat Smithers?"

"But you are not he. Pat was killed. I saw him shot."

"Not quite that bad, me honey! Sure, the raskil tried his best; but his hand wasn't quite steady. He didn't hit me at all."

"Thank fortune! I am glad you are alive. Have you come to help me?"

There could be no mistake but that Pat was beside her, safe and sound. After what had passed between him and Buffin, she did not think he would care to serve the latter any longer; hence her question.

"You may just bet I have," was the response, in an earnest whisper. "You don't think I'll set traps for him any longer?"

"Certainly not. And I am so glad you have

concluded to help me. You shall be well-rewarded for this."

"Never mind now. I only do it to spite Jerry, the rascal. But we'll not lose any speck of time now. Can you crawl away to that big tree just back here, in a few minutes, and not let any of the skunks s'pect what yer up tew?"

"I think so. At any rate, I will try it. Oh, if I can only get home once more!"

"Don't be in a hurry; take things cool. You'll do all the better," was the parting advice of the new-found friend.

He was not long in creeping back into the gloom, where his form was indistinct, and very soon lost to view altogether.

Before making any attempt to carry out the plan he had arranged, Rose remained quiet until satisfied that none of the Indians had suspected his presence. All remained in perfect silence, and among others she heard the heavy snoring of Jerry, at a little distance from the dead embers of the fire.

Satisfied that the present was as favorable an opportunity as she would have, the maiden resolved to employ it. She would make an earnest effort to gain home and safety, now that she had a friend to assist her, and if the trial should prove a failure—Ah, she would not think of it! It could not be that the Great Ruler of all would allow her to be sacrificed to the brutal Jerry Buffin.

Rising quietly to her feet she glided toward the "big tree," whose outlines she had previously located, and arrived there without accident. Making her way around the great trunk, she looked eagerly for the one she expected to meet; but no person was there. Could it be that any deception was being practiced? Certainly he had promised to meet her there.

It could have been but a few moments, though the time seemed insufferably long to the waiting one, before the appearance of the person she was seeking. He came from a tree near by, and taking her hand, led her away from the place.

"I should have been on hand," he whispered, by way of explanation; "but when ye come ye moved so quiet like that I reckined ye might be some of the Injins, wrapped up in a blanket; so I jist stepped out of the way till I'd seen."

"Indeed, I have one of their blankets," said Rose, unfolding the article from her shoulders; "I will not steal that; I'd forgotten that I had it."

"No, no; keep it," said Smithers, picking it up as she dropped it upon the ground; "ye'll need it yourself, and it won't dew to lay it down; 'twill show 'em which way we come, don't ye see, and set 'em right on our track at wanst. Better keep it, tew, 'cause it'll be more'n one day afore I can git ye hum, and ye'll want something tew sleep under."

However that might have been, no consideration would have induced Rose to take the blanket, could she have left it without risking capture. But as every minute was increasing the distance between them and the Indian camp, the finding of it would give any who might start in the search an almost certain guide to the trail of the fugitives.

"But how was it that you escaped Jerry's bullet?" Rose asked, when they had gained such

a distance as made ordinary conversation safe. "I thought you were shot, and certainly you disappeared very suddenly in the water."

"Jerry's aim was bad," was the reply, "and though his ball went purty nigh my ear, and the sound, so clus tew me head, almost stunted me, I warn't hurt. I dropt intew the water afore I knew what I was about, and then, thinks I, this is as good as any place for me. Afore he was on his hoss, I was behind the boat, with my head out, and I seen ye ride away. Thinks I, I'll make ye pay for that, ye spalpeen, so I took his track after I'd got my tools in order, and ye see the result of it, so far."

"Oh, I never can thank you enough; never repay the favor you are doing me; but you shall not go unrewarded, believe me."

"Hush, my honey! There's a puddle, don't fall into it. 'Tain't much on yer own account that I'm helpin' ye; it's all to get my pay of Buffin, the Old Scratch take him! But I've no objection to helpin' yees, however, 'cause I know *that'll* bother him a sight more than it would if I'd 'a' cut off his head as he lay there sleepin'."

"I'm not disposed to be particular in regard to your motives," said Rose, "while I am benefited by their results; but, let me hope that when you reach home and friends again, you will abandon such associates as Jerry, and strive to lead a better life."

"Can't say what I'll do then," returned Smithers, slowly; "but it don't seem to me that there is much prospect of my doing *that*. I've got to be too old a dog to learn new capers. It wouldn't be any use tryin' either, 'cause everybody's afeard of me, and nobody would help me, if I tried to be a decent man."

"You shall have help," said Rose with earnestness; "I will help you; uncle and aunt will help you; Lawrence Estey will help you. Promise me that you will seek their help, and be the man you may so easily become."

The maiden's soul was in her words, and they fell with a persuasive force upon the heart of the listener. There were strings there, deep-bidden though they were, beneath the accumulation of sin and indifference, which vibrated to the influence of the maiden's petition. Prospects of a worthy life rose before the Irish outcast, and momentary hopes that he might yet aspire to it had being in the latent depths of his nature.

"I won't make any promises now," he said, after a short pause; "but I'll see how the land lays when we get there; we ain't there yet, and that ain't the worst of it; we may not get there at all. But I'll tell you one thing, my honey, if anybody could persuade a vagabond to mend his ways, you're the one what could do it."

"Then I shall certainly make every effort in your behalf, and I will pray God to give me wisdom, and show you the way."

"May be He will. But I do think we're goin' to have a tearin' storm. It grows darker every minute, be jabers; and the wind sounds like rain. Confound it, I can't see a single star. Don't know whether we're right or not."

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHT AND STORM.

It was intensely dark now. The few stars

that had shone an hour or two before were all veiled, and the blackness which shrouded the face of nature could almost be felt. It was slow, wearisome and painful work for the two adventurers to plod on in that darkness. Nothing before or around them could be distinguished, not even the trees with which they were every moment coming in violent contact. There were rocks and logs and bushes to impede their progress, unlooked for depressions in the earth which cost many a painful stumble, and projecting knots and limbs which seemed seeking to destroy their clothing.

But despite all disadvantages, the twain struggled on, anxious only to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the sleeping camp.

"The darkness will help us," remarked Rose, as her companion made some discouraging allusion to it. "They can not make any search for us till morning, and if it should rain, as seems probable now, that will serve to destroy the trail which Indians are so famous for following."

"That's true, Miss Jonson; but then you must bear in mind that we have made not half the distance it seems we have. Besides, 'tisn't certain that we're going right away from 'em. All I can tell by is the wind."

"The wind?" repeated Rose; "I have not felt a puff since we started."

"Nether have I; but there is some overhead. The wind was nor'-east when we started, and I feel sure it has not changed since. Hark! Don't you hear that sighin' away up over the tree-tops?"

"She did hear it, very plainly."

"It don't come from the ground," he said, after waiting some time. "Now ye hear another sighin', off yonder; and there it goes, along overhead, and now ye hear it off that way. That's nor'-east whar it comes from, and that's sou'-wes' whar it's going to. So right off this way must be sou'-east, the way we want to go."

"Yes, I see; it is very plain now," said Rose. "But I doubt if I could have shaped my course in that manner, without assistance."

"Most likely not, honey. But, it's going to rain, and we'll dig along as fast as our trotters and this inky blackness will permit."

The first drops could already be heard, falling in the forest about them, while the wind rapidly rose, and soon blowed incessantly, increasing in strength every moment. True, they were quite protected from its force by the thick woods about, but a damo chill pervaded the forest, which benumbed their limbs, showing that the storm would be cold and uncomfortable.

"Of course we shall not mind that," Rose said, as they discussed the probabilities; "but I should be so much better pleased if we could put a good distance between us and the Indian camp before morning. We are laboring under disadvantages, as we have no horses, while most, if not all, the red-men are mounted."

"Niver mind that, honey," returned Pat, with easy confidence. "I've seen a cat try to catch a mouse, afore now, and e'en a'most git her paws on him, but mousey would draw back into a hole,

and pussy 'd find that she 'd growed jest about six sizes tew large."

"So you think that we can get along better on foot than they can with horses, I presume," said the maiden.

"A good guess, miss. You see we can pick our ground, and if they follow, they must take it as it comes—which isn't just the thing for a horse, y' see."

"Cer'ainly."

"Well, I've hunted off this way enough to know jest where such land lies as will bother man and beast illigantly. So you may yet bet that when mornin' comes we'll take a route that they 'd never dream of."

"Oh, I only hope we may be successful," said the anxious Rose, and then she clung more closely to the hand of her guide, as he moved down a ravine, crossed a small stream, and began ascending the opposite bank.

It was raining now, quite steadily, and as the water began to descend, the force of the wind abated. For some time the foliage above screened the wanderers from the falling drops, as it had from the wind previously. But soon the leaves were thoroughly soaked, and then great drops began to shower upon the heads and backs of the toilers. Every garment was speedily wet through, but of this they were unmindful. Each step was bearing them on away from danger, and placing ground difficult to traverse in pursuit, between them and Buffin.

But, on how slender a thread may hang the destinies of a life!

While making as rapid progress as possible over a tolerably smooth stretch of ground, Pat struck his foot against a flat rock, and stumbled, falling upon it with considerable force. A quick exclamation followed, as he rose to his feet, and began to stamp about, grasping his bruised knee in both hands.

"You are not hurt?" asked Rose, in a voice of concern, as she sprung to his side.

"Not much; jest marked one knee a bit. Be all right in two minutes."

The injury, though not of a serious nature, was quite painful for a time, and he danced about under the smart.

"Confound the rock," he muttered, with a variety of adjectives not sanctioned by refined usage. "If my knee should be hurt bad, a purty fix we'd be in for trampin' this dark night."

"Can't see your hand afore ye," he continued, after a momentary pause, holding up one of his broad palms with digits spread out. "Great sight this for a man wid one leg and a half. Let's see; which way was we a-going?"

The question was carelessly enough asked, but it involved an inquiry of immense practical moment. Pat had turned upon his axis at least a dozen times since the accident, and Rose had been so solicitous for his welfare, that she paid little attention to anything else. She hesitated a moment, and then returned, with some embarrassment:

"I cannot say, but it seems to me *that* is the way we were going."

"Have ye kept the p'int in yer mind?"

"I have not; and I am far from positive in the matter. I only *think* that is way, because it seems so to me."

"Never mind; we'll tell by the wind in a minute. Jist hark for it."

Both listened intently for a long time, but not the slightest whisper could be heard. The rain fell upon the leaves with a dull, steady hissing, and thence descended to the earth in heavy patters. It seemed evident that the gale had entirely died out.

"Divil fly away wid the bit of wind thar is," said Pat, falling into his native phrasing, which he very seldom allowed himself to do. "But it's the likes of Pat Smithers what can tell his way widout any wind at all. Whar's the old haythin of a rock?"

So completely had they lost all bearings, that they required some time to recover the stone which had been the cause of the misfortune. And when found it threw no light upon the mystery. There were footsteps upon all sides of it, and all attempts to locate themselves or find a trail leading to the place, proved useless.

"We may as well give it up," said Pat, after vain efforts to set himself right. "We'll find a place for rest till the wind rises ag'in, and we'll go on."

This was anything but a desirable situation, but as they could make nothing better of it, both parties acquiesced with cheerful grace, and began searching for some place where they would be measurably sheltered from the rain. They had encountered many large rocks in their journey thus far, and frequently they were shelving masses of granite, which would have given quite a comfortable protection from the storm.

"Likely we'll hunt till mornin' and not find another," said Pat, after they had made researches in nearly all directions, without meeting anything that promised to serve any good purpose. "It's too bad for a miss like you to camp down in this rain. Be sart'in to catch yer death o' cold. Hello, what's this?"

The exclamation was caused by his hand coming in contact with a rocky surface.

"Here's a rock, and a big one, too. Wonder if there bees a ledge what we kin steal under?"

"I should say you were under a ledge now," remarked Rose. "Feel overhead."

He did so, and found that they were beneath a projecting shelf, which effectually sheltered them. The leaves were perfectly dry upon the ground beneath, notwithstanding the quantity of rain which had fallen.

"Jest the place for us, honey," he exclaimed, joyfully. "How lucky we be! Lay down and rest yourself, Miss Jonson, while I keep a lookout for the fu'st chance thar is of findin' our way ag'in."

Rose was really exhausted by the long and arduous tramp they had taken, and prepared to avail herself of the kind offer, with many expressions of gratitude to her thoughtful companion. But as she was upon the point of sinking down, a distant cry was borne to her ears.

"Ho! what is that?" she asked, quickly springing to her feet. "Did you not hear something in the distance?"

"Yes'm, I heard it. But jest wait a minute, till it comes ag'in."

Both listened intently, but they were not kept long in suspense. From the forest, far away, on the right, came a low howl, which neither of them hesitated a moment in deciding to be the cry of a wolf. A moment later, it was answered from a dozen different points, and a full chorus of howls was borne to the ears of the electrified adventurers.

"There's a pack of them," remarked Pat, as the sounds ceased for a moment.

"So I perceive by the cries. Do you think they are coming this way?"

"Should think they were," replied Smithers, after listening again. "Seems their howls sound louder'n they did at first."

"Do you think there is any danger from them?"

"Well, I'll tell you; it's a time o' the year when they are hungry and cross. Ye can't tell much about 'em. In common times I shouldn't be any afeard of a hundred of 'em; but now they might take a notion to a warm meal."

The twain listened some moments, and they could hear the sounds growing more distinct each moment. There could be no mistake of the fact that the wolves were coming almost directly that way.

"Hadn't we better seek a place of safety?" asked Rose, as the sounds increased.

She was evidently frightened at the wild beasts, since the danger was of a nature she had never before experienced.

"I'll see what can be done," said Pat, and with the words he left her side. The darkness having become much less dense, the fugitives could distinguish objects around them.

He was gone but a short time before returning.

"This rock 'll make a good fort," he observed. "There's but one corner a man can git on it, and I'm certain sure a wolf can't, though 'tain't much likely they'll try it."

He led the way, and Rose followed, keeping close to him. With Pat's assistance she was soon mounted upon the top of the rock.

"Wait till I cut me a shillalah," he remarked, feeling about for a sapling of convenient size.

But he was obliged to forego the luxury of a native weapon, for the sounds of the hungry animals could be heard year at hand, rushing through the forest. They had ceased barking now—in itself an ominous sign.

Smithers was just in time, and no more. As he sprung upon the rock, one of the savage animals came around the corner, and threw himself against the massive wall with beastly fury.

"Try it again, old feller," remarked Pat, producing a pistol, which he held carefully under a corner of his garments. "Maybe ye can climb that, but blame me if I believe it."

Nothing short of repeated trials seemed to satisfy his wolfship, for he bounded up again and again, falling short each time, till he seemed satisfied of the hopeless nature of the attempt, when he gave it up with a sullen howl.

But, his place was quickly filled by others. At least a dozen, if not more, had now gathered around the base of the rock, sniffing the air, and howling, springing against the barrier, and using all manner of mad endeavors to gain the prey which seemed so near. Others were com-

ing every moment, and the prospect began to look anything but cheering, even if no danger should be apprehended from the wolves themselves.

"Keep us here till Jerry can pick us up, will ye?" exclaimed Pat, striking out spitefully with his knife at those who attempted to spring upon the rock. "Bound to raise a muss one way or another, I'll warrant. I'll hurt some of ye, purty soon."

At length a long, gaunt sort of fellow, with more muscular power than those which had preceded him, sprung so high that he was enabled to claw the surface of the stone, and scramble for some seconds before slipping back. A second effort brought him yet higher.

"Hillo!" remarked Pat; "that chap is bound to be up. I'll have to look out for him."

He could just see the outlines and shining eyes of the beast, as he sprung upon the rock, and when the third attempt was made, he placed the muzzle of a pistol close between the two fiery balls, and fired. Without another movement, the body slipped back, and in two minutes the balance of the pack was quarreling over the bare bones.

"That's right," he remarked; "feed on one another if ye are p'sky hungry, and then go off. Blame me, if thar don't come daylight! Either that, or the storm is over, and that ain't it, for it rains as hard as ever."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE GORGE.

YES, it must be that daybreak was at hand. The night had been long enough, and full enough of adventure to give place now to another day. Upon all hands, Pat and Rose could see the trees emerging from the pall of blackness, could see the rock upon which they stood, and the rabid, moving animals a few feet below them. Still, the darkness had not disappeared; it was only becoming *more visible*.

Pat, satisfied that none of the wolves could gain their perch upon the rock, moved to the side of Rose, who was anxiously scanning the near foliage, looking anxiously for some rift in the clouds above, through which the shining stars should reveal the cause of the decreasing gloom.

"You see that it's a'most mornin', I s'pose."

"Yes, I see it," was the reply, accompanied by a shudder; "and we no further on our way!"

"Never mind. Daylight is better nor any other to travel by, and we'll soon be putting good miles atween us and this spot."

"But these wolves? They seem determined to make a meal of us before quitting the place."

"They shan't do anything of the kind. I'll see to them right away."

The lean animals, evidently tired of attempts to scale the rocks, sat all about it, with sharp noses pointing toward the occupants of the natural fortress. It was sufficiently light to distinguish their gaunt forms, and Pat proceeded to reload the pistol he had discharged some time before, remarking as he did so:

"I'll have to give the villains a touch o' powder and lead, I hate to do it, but it's the only

way. Seeing I've nothing but these two pistols 'twon't make a great racket. Ye see I'll take that first spalpeen down there, and, mind ye, I'll make him *l'ape*!"

He poised the pistol carefully, and fired. The beast at which it was aimed sprung from the ground and walked away, whining and limping. A general commotion ensued, but in a moment all was quiet again, and as many muzzles, less one, were turned up toward the intended victims.

"Didn't finish him," remarked Pat, "but it's every bit as well; he won't trouble us any more."

He reloaded the pistol, and after pushing it into a hidden receptacle, drew forth another, which he discharged several times, wounding three or four, and killing two of the savage animals. The prospect was not encouraging. He might fire for an hour in the same manner, and yet not be able to leave the place. Besides, if a searching party should start out at early dawn, and come that way, they might hear the shots, and be led directly to the spot.

Pat was anxiously meditating in his own mind, what course to take, when one of the animals broke into a howl, and sniffing the air in an easterly direction, began to trot away. His example seemed contagious, and in sixty seconds not one, save those too badly hurt to crawl, remained about the rock.

"Good, good," exclaimed the delighted Rose, as she saw the movement. "God is good. Now we can go on our way. Don't let us lose any time in waiting."

They merely satisfied themselves that the animals really had decamped, and then they descended from the rock, shaped their course, and sped away fast as they could travel.

It was not fully day, though light enough for all their purposes. The rain still fell, though in much less volume than a few hours previously. The ground was well soaked, and the fugitives noticed with some alarm that their feet left traces that no skill upon their part could prevent. Still, if the rain should continue a short time longer, it would obliterate them most effectually. If they were not pursued soon, there was little fear that they would be tracked.

"The good Lord knows what we'll have for fodder," said Pat, after they had been traveling for some time; "I don't."

"Never mind that," returned Rose; "I'm in no great need of food, and if I were, should not let it trouble me at such a time. We'll find something; and if not, 'twill be little matter. We can fast until reaching friends."

"It's ashamed I am if I can't boast the grit of a lass," said Pat, laughing. "If you don't feel concerned at an empty stomach, I'd starve to me death, be jabers, to keep up wid ye."

Little was said, for both were very intent upon traveling as fast as possible. The way was rough, and at some places it required all their skill to find safe passage. Yet, these hindrances did not trouble them in the least, since, if Buffin should pursue, there would be much more perplexity to him, in getting through with his horse, than it was now to the fugitives.

Thus they toiled on, hour after hour. The rain had ceased, and, though the wind swept

over the forest, and whistled among the trees, and clouds covered most of the sky, the sun peeped forth at intervals, to cheer the dwellers of the wet and reeking earth. These beams had proved to them that they were pursuing very nearly the proper course, and that fact added strength to their exhausted limbs.

"I must rest a few minutes," said Rose, after superhuman efforts to keep beside her stronger companion. "I am very weak, but a few moments' quiet will make me well again."

They had reached the banks of a forbidding-looking gulch in the mountains, which it became necessary to cross, and before attempting the almost precipitous descent, Rose felt that she should require more strength.

"That's right; take it easy, honey. It's an ugly job we've got afore us, and I don't blame ye for gittin' tired out. Faith, ye stan' it like an old recruit. Better on a tramp now than half the men. Set here till ye're rested, and I'll keep a lookout that nobody's trackin' us."

There was a slight crest some distance to the rear, and hastening to this, Pat threw himself upon the ground, selecting a point whence he could survey a large extent of territory. Here he remained, sweeping his keen gaze through the scattering forest as far as the nature of the scenery would admit.

Rose was much gratified with the short respite from travel, and the wet earth upon which she was reclining seemed a couch of down. Indeed, so utterly was she exhausted, that it was with the utmost difficulty she could keep her eyes from closing.

Finally, unable to keep her faculties in full play, she allowed her eyelids to shut, and in a moment she was in the land of forgetfulness.

She was awakened in a few minutes, however, by a quick, sharp hiss, and opened her eyes in time to see some strange movements on the part of Pat Smithers.

That individual was in motion, but not in the ordinary manner. She first saw him roll over the crest of the hill, and thence down the slope some feet toward the place where she was sitting. Then, springing to his feet, he ran, bent nearly to the earth, till he reached her side. Grasping her arm he drew her over the bank and began to descend with much more rapidity than caution.

"What is it?" the astonished maiden asked, after she had found breath to speak.

"Buffin," was the short reply. "He and two or three Injins are arter us with a little half-wolf-dog. That critter must be disposed of. Run around behind that rock, and wait till I come; or you see that I ain't likely to. Quick; there is no time to lose."

She hastened to obey, wondering if she was again to fall into the power of that bad man—wondering a thousand things more, which she could not have framed into intelligible questions at that moment. It was but a short distance to the rock, and gaining that she threw herself upon the other side, trembling excessively with fatigue and excitement.

Smithers, meanwhile, hastened back close to the edge of the bank and stretched himself at full length in such a manner that his hand rested just where their feet had trod in passing over

the brink. Maintaining his position by clinging to the root, he awaited in perfect silence the working of his plan. In a few moments there came a quick snuffing just above, and shortly afterward a dog's nose was poked over the brink. With a yelp the animal drew back, but he was too late. A quick and strong hand had caught him by the throat, and he was drawn over before any struggle of his could effect his release.

"To the Ould Scratch wid ye, ye murtherin' b'aste!" exclaimed Pat, in the richest of Hibernian. "Ye've done mischief anuff for one bright, rainy mornin'. Take that, and that, ye haythin man's dog!"

He compressed the struggling dog's neck in his iron grasp at every sentence, dashing its head against all the rocks in his course as he sprung to the place where he was to rejoin Rose. By the time he reached it the poor animal was well-nigh killed, and giving his head a finishing blow, Pat hurled the carcass far down to the bottom of the gorge.

"Sure, they'll think the poor pup fell and hurt hisself!" he exclaimed, grasping the hand of Rose and turning quickly in an unexpected direction. "He was at the bottom o' their trackin' us to, and Lucken they'll be lothered more now than they've been so fur. Here, right up this way, and we'll git back onto the side we come from as soon as they begin to cross."

The place was wild and rugged enough, so that there was no difficulty in finding hiding-places in plenty. But, that was not the object of Pat. He wished to avoid the search of the Indians and Buffin, dodging them in the gorge till he could slip them entirely and take some route toward their destination, even if less direct than the one they wished to follow.

To do this successfully, required much assurance and tact. While it would have been comparatively easy for a single man, unburdened, to accomplish it, when charged with the care of a woman, as in the case of Pat, the dangers were multiplied greatly.

But Pat was not easily daunted. Striking out the course which he judged most prudent to follow, he urged Rose forward with all possible speed, often half dragging her along in his eagerness to get beyond danger. What course the pursuers would take upon losing the trail, he knew not. If they hesitated and detailed, as most white men would be apt to do, he would have ample time.

Such he began to think really was the case, when looking up he espied an Indian riding along the margin of the ravine. The savage was looking another way at the moment, and trusting they had not been seen, Pat drew his companion behind a cluster of bushes which grew near. The Indian rode on at a round pace, and, as he showed no signs of having made any discovery, the adventurers breathed more freely.

"We'll have to be mighty careful, though," said Pat in a low tone, as they hurried on again. "They've lost the track, and like a snake in tall grass, there's no knowing where they'll come out."

Rose was pale and excited. Danger was thickening about them, and it scarcely seemed

possible to her that they could escape. The way was so hedged about with difficulties, that it must be a fortunate chance indeed which should take them through in safety.

She expressed her doubts to Pat, in a few words.

"Never a fear of any such thing," he said, in the happiest of tones. "Many a time I've been in the hands of men what owed me no good will, and got away ag'in. If a chap ain't as lucky in a good case as a bad one, why blow me if I don't tack ship again, and sail under the old colors."

"Better to be unfortunate in a good cause than to succeed in a bad one," said Rose.

"So it may be to some. I think I'd rather hev the luck, and let good or bad take care of themselves. But, I don't mean to fail now. Jist you crawl in atween them rocks, and don't stir till I come back. I want to make out how things are working."

The maiden did as requested, crawling into an aperture scarcely large enough to receive her body, and here she remained for some time. She was beginning to feel alarm, when she heard careful steps, and looked forth to see her friend returning. He came rather quickly, beckoning her forth as he drew near.

"I believe 'tis all right," he said, when he had taken her hand again. "I can't see any of 'em. Must be they've gone off some other way. We'll go to that patch of bushes, and inside them we can work our way to the top. If it looks all right we'll try our luck once more on a straight cut."

A belt of low trees and bushes stretched from the bottom of the gorge to the top of the bank; and when once they had gained this, there was very little danger of their movements being observed, unless some one should be watching that very point with particular attention.

As he had seen no trace of the pursuers, Pat had little fear that they were in the vicinity. He moved boldly, therefore, and with less caution than had characterized his former movements.

They were more than half-way to the top of the ascent, when Rose caught his arm.

"See, there is an Indian," she whispered, pointing to the top of the bank.

Her quick eye had caught sight of a horseman, and she drew her companion's attention to it at once.

"So there is, by Halifax! It won't do to go up there now!" he exclaimed, dropping upon hands and knees, and beating a hasty retreat; while Rose followed his example as nearly as possible.

CHAPTER XI.

REAPING WHAT WAS SOWN.

THE Pawnee, for it was to this tribe the red-men belonged, at once started in pursuit of the retreating party, leaving his horse above, while another appeared on foot, coming up the gulch. Placed between two fires, Pat had need of all his sagacity and daring.

Taking Rose by the hand, he drew her rapidly away, taking the direction which would bring both of the pursuers behind them. At the same moment, Jerry in person appeared upon the

bank above, and took in the situation of affairs at a glance.

"Take 'em," he shouted, in hoarse tones of rage. "Git the gal without hurtin' her; but kill the other skunk if ye want tew."

The Indians bounded forward, and being fresh and unincumbered, had greatly the advantage over Pat and the maiden. Coming from different points, as they did, they could keep close watch that the fugitives did not dodge them.

In a very few minutes Pat saw that the prospect of distancing them by direct flight was gone. Seizing Rose by the arm, as she darted past him, he hoarsely whispered:

"Take care of yourself; I'll see to these critters."

He had a pistol in either hand, and his manner implied desperation. The maiden paused, for she knew not how to proceed. The Pawnees also came to a partial halt, on seeing the determined front presented toward them.

"Stop where ye be," said Pat, without removing his gaze from the red-men. "This lass is trying to git away from a cuss what she bates like p'izen, and she's a parfiect right to go. Now don't ye try to stop her, 'cause if ye do, it'll be a sorry job for some of ye. Now, jist go yer own way, and let the gal alone. If ye don't, I'll fight fer her to the death, I will."

Something in the manner of the speaker seemed to impress the red-men favorably. They conferred in their own language for a moment, and then one of them remarked:

"You steal squaw away in night."

"That's a lie! She wanted to get away from that scamp of a Buffin, and I helped her. Ask the gal if it hain't so."

"Indeed it was," said the maiden, seeing that the Indians expected her to confirm or deny the statement. "If you have any pity or any friendship for me, or any wish to do right, you will let me go to my home with this man."

The Pawnees drew somewhat nearer together, and seemed to consult as to the most proper course for them to pursue. But they were not left to decide the matter by themselves. There came the sharp report of a rifle from behind a rock near by. As Rose glanced in that direction, she observed Pat to stagger backward. He recovered himself, however, and handed the pistols, which he still held, to Rose.

"I'm done for now!" he exclaimed, in a husky voice.

The maiden had barely grasped the weapons, when he fell heavily to the earth, his head coming in contact with a rock as he did so.

"Oh, my poor friend," the horror-stricken girl exclaimed, bending over him. "They have killed you, after all!"

She knew there could be no mistake. He was gasping heavily, while the hot life-blood spouted from his breast, as though from a pent-up fountain. She bent nearer the face, but his eyes were closed, and there was no appearance of consciousness.

"I thought I'd cure that fightin' disposition of his'n," said Jerry Buffin, in demoniac triumph, as he strode toward the spot. "I had a good aim that time, and blind my eyes if I think he'll appear tew me ag'in, when I git through with 'im."

"Vile murderer!" said Rose, throwing scorn and hatred into every feature. "Away! you shall not touch his body with your bloody fingers! He was my friend! He died for me!"

"Died because he was a fool!" said Jerry, with contempt, although he trembled at the glances of Rose. "Now don't go to takin' on, but jest hand over them pistils; they ain't proper play-things fer such a waspish little critter as you!"

"Back!" she exclaimed, cocking and presenting one of the weapons at him. "I will shoot you with my own hands before you shall touch me or him again."

"Seem tew think a good deal of the man that burnt yer uncle out o' house and burn. Yes, maybe burn't 'em all up alive. But, never mind, he's dead enough now, I'll promise."

A glance at the motionless figure before her convinced the poor girl that the fiendish exultations of Jerry were not without foundation. There was no movement, and no indication that life still existed.

"Now come. I'll git these Injins tew bury the feller ye seem to think so much of, so the wolves won't tear up his precious carkiss, and you can ride back to camp with me."

He advanced toward the maiden again, but was halted by the dark pistol-muzzle, which stared him in the face.

"Do not touch me," she said, in tones of fearful energy. "I will shoot you, as sure as there is a God in heaven rather than go with you from this place. You have justly forfeited your own life, and no one will blame me if I take it."

"See here, fellers," said Jerry, turning to the two Indians, who stood back a little distance; "take them pistils away from her. She'll kill some of us with them."

The Pawnees approached, but it was slowly. They did not fancy the idea of coming into close quarters with the maiden, whose resolute bearing, flashing eyes, and calm manner, showed plainly that she meant and was capable of performing precisely what she said. That Jerry Buffin, with all his hardness of heart, realized that fact, there could be no doubt, since he stood in his tracks, uneasily watching the ugly weapons.

Rose had no decided plan of action. She had expected no such crisis, and was not prepared for it. But she had resolved never to leave the place with the cowardly murderer whom she was holding in check, not even if she was forced to spill his blood or her own to prevent the consummation.

Quite likely if she had turned to the Pawnees, and commanded them not to touch her, that request would have been obeyed. But she did not think of so doing. Fearful that they would steal upon and overpower her, she turned in a moment, and with a speed which fear lent her, fled up the hill.

The Pawnees were not forward to pursue her. Buffin dared not follow her alone while she was possessed of the two pistols. While the coward was urging his dusky assistants up, Rose gained the summit and looked back upon them for a moment.

Gratified at her success thus far, she turned to continue her wild flight. But a sudden idea struck her. Not more than ten rods away one

of the horses was feeding. Could she not gain his back and thus foil her enemy? The attempt was certainly worthy of being made.

With all her strength she fled toward the animal, which did not seem at all startled. It merely raised his head, and continued feeding upon the bunches of grass and herbs which presented.

Catching the bridle, she managed to clamber to the saddle, just as her pursuers reached the margin of the gorge.

Jerry saw the state of affairs, and feeling that Rose would forego her deadly purpose in anxiety to get away from the place, rushed forward to attempt her detention. He was too late, however. She turned her horse's head upon getting her seat, and striking him a smart blow with one of the pistols, away they went through the wood.

She had taken a direction away from the other horses, which she saw at some distance, and knowing that her pursuers must first be mounted, she had strong hopes of being able to distance them, in the long race which she felt certain would follow. The act of urging up her horse, however, had cost her the loss of one of the pistols, which flew from her hand, and which one of the Indians was soon brandishing in triumph.

Rose did not regard the loss, however. She had a fair start, and all her energies were bent upon keeping it. Before she had ridden far, her ears were saluted by the report of a gun, and at the same moment a ball passed close beside her horse, whistling shrilly as it went past. Glancing back she saw Buffin return the musket he had just discharged to one of the Pawnees, and heard the abusive string of oaths which he poured forth on account of his failure. He had intended to wound or kill the horse which she rode, but using a strange weapon, and possessing not over-steady nerves he had failed. A general stampede for the remaining horses ensued, and not caring to watch their movements further, Rose bent all her energies toward getting away as fast as possible.

The region through which they were riding was an open wood; so open, in fact, that little inconvenience resulted from the trees, which could be avoided with the utmost ease. The ground was tolerably level and quite firm, so that the footing was reasonably secure.

Carefully securing her only remaining weapon, which she counted upon as a last resort, in case of extreme need, Rose bestowed all the energies toward making the best possible speed. The direction was not such as to take her nearer home; on the contrary, she was going almost at right angles to the course she wished to pursue. But if Buffin was left behind, it was little matter to her in what direction she rode. She therefore kept on, riding beside the chasm, which seemed to extend far among the mountains.

Poor Rose! More than once she thought of Pat, who had been slain so basely, when endeavoring to undo some of the wicked work which he had previously done. Yet she could not but admit that he had sown the wind, and should have expected to reap the whirlwind. His crimes had brought their own punishment.

Y t how much she regretted that he had not been suffered to live, and become (as she felt certain he would have become) a reformed and worthy young man.

Very soon, however, she realized that such reflections were not only useless, but out of place and dangerous. She was left alone, and her own brain was to devise her safety. She had no friend to counsel or assist. Thus far she had really marked out no course, and now she began to feel that random endeavors would not answer her purpose.

Before she could really set her reasoning powers to work, however, she heard the gallop of pursuers. Partially turned in her saddle she saw that Jerry and one of the Indians had mounted horses, and were bearing rapidly down in pursuit.

Rose was a thorough horsewoman, having been fond of the exercise from early girlhood. She knew that the test would be the comparative powers of the different animals. The one she rode was tolerable, both for speed and promise of endurance. As she was much lighter than either of the men, there was a certain advantage in that respect resting with her.

For a mile the race continued, and neither had gained perceptibly. Possibly Jerry was a trifle nearer, but his Pawnee companion had fallen back, so that his gain really amounted to nothing.

There was an emboliment of unbridled passion upon the face of Bullin. While riding he had succeeded in reloading his rifle, and now reined his horse up beside a tree. Resting the barrel of the weapon, so as to obtain a steady aim, he deliberately sighted the flying horsewoman. The distance was long, but his rifle was heavy, and famous for its performances at long range.

Rose glanced back at the moment, and beheld the state of affairs. It seemed to her that the distance was too great for an effective shot, especially after her escape at so much shorter range; still she bent forward, breathing a prayer for safety.

The report came soon, and then Jerry urged forward his horse again. Simultaneous with the report came a dull thud, and Rose knew that her horse was struck. The wounded animal leaped wildly, and she felt that he would very soon be utterly beyond her power of control.

A moment later they mounted a sharp rise of ground. On descending, the rider saw that the poor beast was staggering. Glancing back she had the satisfaction to see that she was momentarily shut from the sight of her pursuers.

Checking the speed of the animal as much as possible, she sprung to the ground, struck him a smart blow with the palm of her hand, and hastened over the almost perpendicular brink of the chasm, near which she had been riding.

The poor horse, relieved of his load, and frantic with the pain of his wound, dashed away into the forest, disregarding the direction taken, and striking out to suit his fancy. A moment later the pursuers came in sight, but were disappointed at not finding themselves close upon the fugitive.

"I'm sart'in I hit the hoss," Rose heard her

persecutor remark. "He can't go fur, afore he'll begin tew give out."

The words were lost in the distance as they swept away, none of them aware that the horse was minus a rider.

No sooner had they passed than Rose began to scramble downward, more than thankful that she had succeeded in sending them off upon a vain chase. In addition she noticed that the ground was more rocky here than it had been below, so that nothing but the closest scrutiny could discover her trail, and then it would be a very difficult matter to follow it.

In a short time she reached the bottom of the gulch, and here, amid the wild horrors which surrounded her, she paused, overcome by the terrible realities of her situation.

CHAPTER XII.

STRUGGLING ALONE.

ALTHOUGH momentarily relieved of the pursuit, and free to act as might seem best to her, Rose realized that her respite would be but brief. Of course, sooner or later, Jerry and his Indian ally would discover that they were upon the wrong track, when they would at once retrace their steps, and institute a thorough search for her. At the longest it would be but a short time before she might expect to see them peering over the bank above her. Whatever measure she would take for safety must be set about at once.

The place about her was lonely and gloomy enough, yet from this very peculiarity sprung most of her hopes. It seemed that she must be able to find some place of retreat, where she could rest for a time, and be safe from the search of Jerry and his assistants.

Rest! Oh, how she longed for it. Weary and worn as she was, the poor trembler had been able to bear up so long only by reason of the great excitement under which she had been laboring. But now a reaction was taking place, and it seemed she could scarcely stand without assistance. She did sink upon the ground for a few moments, as her trembling limbs refused to perform their office, and gave herself up to the dreadful feeling of helplessness which came rushing upon her.

It was only a moment that she sat there, however, for a sense of her great danger came back, and she regained her feet, to make one more effort to reach a place of safety. Her first move was to take the pistol, which she yet retained, from her dress, and make sure that it was in order for use. She was sufficiently accustomed to firearms to satisfy herself upon that point, and when assured that it was all right, she replaced it, with a ghastly smile upon her features.

"You are my only friend now," she said, half to herself, half to the weapon. "A strange friend for a frail woman, and yet you may stand between me and—"

She did not finish the sentence audibly. The thought was too fearful for expression in words. She merely glanced about to make sure that she was alone, and then turned her hesitating footsteps into the rocky chasm.

Large bowlders were piled all about, and the ground itself seemed covered with a coating of rock. This was all the more fortunate for Rose,

since her footsteps left absolutely no traces, and she felt certain that not even the keen-eyed savages could follow her by the trail. But which way should she go—up or down? Looking up the gorge, she saw that it ended not far away, resolving itself into a mere ravine. Downward, then, was the proper way for her to go—back toward the fearful scenes of a few minutes previous.

It was not without some hesitation that she came to this conclusion, and kept in the ravine rather than take to the open land upon the other side. It was only that places for hiding were so frequent, and the advantages for concealment so great, that she resolved to risk meeting the third Indian, who might be coming up as she went down, for aught she knew to the contrary.

Slowly, wearily and painfully she traveled on. At times she was obliged to pick her way through dank, thick masses of rank weeds, whose very odor seemed poisonous. Again, nothing but piles of massive rocks lay in her way, and over them she was obliged to climb as best she could. Anon the soil would be moist and yielding, so that she was obliged to be very cautious as to the manner in which she stepped upon it, or tracks would have been left which would serve as certain guides to those who might follow.

All the while she was obliged to be more than watchful, since those she was endeavoring to escape might come upon her from any quarter. Thus, though the maiden's progress was slow, she had traveled some distance, and seen nothing to excite fear and apprehension. On the contrary, she began to entertain fresh hopes. If she could but rest for an hour or two, now began to be the thought uppermost in her mind. She was in need of food, to be sure, but that was not so pressing in its demands as the call for relief from such incessant exertion.

She was climbing over an unusually rugged pile of rocks, when she espied an opening between two large blocks of stone. All was intensely dark within, and quite in vain were all her efforts to peep inside. This was just the place for concealment. None of her enemies could see her if they should chance to pass by. There were no tracks to lead any one thither, and it did not seem probable that the place would be subjected to a very close scrutiny. Reasoning thus, she concluded to enter.

Carefully feeling her way with a stick which she had seized, Rose soon accomplished several feet of the dark distance. Surely it was quite a cavern. All around her the black space seemed stretching away.

A sickly, musty odor pervaded the place, but this she supposed to be owing to its situation, since it must be deep beneath the surface of the earth. She determined to rest for a while, and then investigate more fully the extent and nature of the cavern.

While searching with her stick for a place adapted to sitting purposes, she was startled by a low sort of purring noise, which she did not at first comprehend. At the same time she noticed an increase of the unpleasant odor. On looking down, she discovered two or three pairs of eyes shining in the darkness. Meantime the growls became more decided, and left no doubt upon

the mind of the maiden as to the nature of the place.

She had entered a bear's den! Very fortunately for her, the adult members of the family were away, and only the helpless cubs remained to welcome the intruder.

It is useless for us to attempt portraying the surprise and horror which filled the soul of the maiden at this discovery. A fearful fate seemed to hold her within its grasp, a fate of which she had never dreamed before. She was in a cave with a number of cubs. At any moment the dam might return, and she should be torn in pieces, to provide food for the quadrupeds.

She looked quickly about for the entrance, but how far away it seemed! Surely she had not penetrated thus far! Before she could reach it the parent bear might return, and then her fate would be sealed.

All these thoughts and many more passed through her brain in a moment, as she sprung toward the opening. Half way there she struck her foot against a stone and pitched head foremost upon the rocky bottom of the cavern. She was not hurt, however, and if she had been, in her excited state, she would have been unaware of the fact unless she were quite disabled.

Gaining her feet as quickly as possible, she hastened to the open air, which she reached without further adventure. Casting about a quick glance, which discovered no new object of terror, and indeed, would scarcely have done so had twenty been within view, she started forward, anxious only to leave the scene of danger behind.

Forgetting again the exhaustion which continued exertion had induced, she proceeded rapidly, until a familiar scene burst upon her eyes. Not far in advance was the place where Pat had made such earnest endeavors to protect her, and where his life had been so foully taken away by a villain's hand.

The sight of the scenery about, which seemed burned upon her brain, was too much. She could not pass that fearful place, and before she had reasoned upon the matter, she was climbing the opposite bank. Having gained the upper land and open forest again, she paused to consider.

What to do? In which direction to go? These were the two great problems of the present situation. Before her lay the most direct route toward her home. But it was through the open forest. No places of refuge were scattered along the way, nor any convenient nooks in which she might hide away from pursuers. Would it be best for her to attempt the journey in her present state? Clearly she felt that it would not. She resolved to make one more effort to find a hiding-place within the gorge, and if that should fail, she would be governed by circumstances.

Making a wide circuit, so as to avoid any one who might be lingering near the place, she sought the brink of the abyss again. This time she was near the place where they had first entered it, though upon the opposite side.

As she gained the bottom, Rose started, and grew sick at heart upon seeing a mangled form lying before her. She regained courage, however, upon recognizing it as the Indian dog-de-

stroyed by Pat Smithers. It was not a long time since she had crouched behind that black rock above her, and yet how much of adventure had been crowded into it. She grew heart-sick and discouraged, when the realization came home to her that she was not an ell nearer safety than when she had reached that place in the morning. Not so near, in fact, for then she had a friend to assist her, and now she could rely upon nothing save the cold iron weapon which she carried concealed.

Quite naturally, she put one hand upon the supposed resting-place of the pistol. It was gone! The discovery was like the rending away of the last hope. She saw how it was; she had lost it in the bear's den. Her last resort was gone. Henceforth, she could only depend upon her skill to keep her from danger.

Despite the fearful experience which had been the lot of Rose in the first cave she had entered, she instinctively found herself looking about for another. It seemed that in no other place would she be as safe, as when hidden in the bowels of the earth. There the darkness would bring a relief to the gloom of her mind, and she could rest and sleep. This she must do, before attempting the long journey to her home.

Casting her eyes right and left as she made her way painfully onward, she soon noticed a cleft between two rocks, which seemed to indicate a passage beyond. Carefully approaching it, she scanned the earth in front of the opening, to make sure that she was not approaching another inhabited den. Satisfied upon that point, so far as she could be by external evidence, she carefully entered.

A short survey showed her that the place was not so extensive as she had anticipated. It was merely an opening between two rocks, some seven or eight feet in length, and a broad-based triangle in form.

She was somewhat disappointed at the size of the place, and yet she found that it was dry, and floored with earth. Quite likely she would find no better place. In her exhausted state she did not feel like looking further.

Throwing herself upon the earth, she gave way to the emotions which were pressing upon her. For the first time since leaving the cavern by the lake, she found relief in tears.

But she was calm again soon. Oh, how grateful seemed the rest and repose which she was enjoying! True, she was very hungry, but the pangs were stilled because she could obtain no food, and it was not a great matter after all. With a little sleep she would be fully invigorated, and then it would be a comparatively easy task to reach home, where the kind offices of her friends would soon atone for what she might suffer in reaching them.

Her mind filled with such thoughts, Rose soon became drowsy and unconscious. Nor did she struggle against the feeling. Commending herself to the Father above for protection, she resigned her wearied frame to the soothing embrace of the restoring angel, sleep.

Strange and wild visions passed through the brain of the sleeper. At times their very strangeness startled her back into a state of semi-consciousness, from which she would relapse again to the land of dreams.

Finally she fancied herself again in the den of bears. The cubs were there as before, but not in groups of two or three. The whole interior seemed filled with them. Frantically she struggled to reach the entrance. But, vain the effort. Not a muscle would obey her will. Desperately she struggled, with her gaze fixed upon the opening. It seemed yet further away, and even now a coming form seemed to darken it. But instead of the enraged parent bears, she was horrified to see the sinister and exulting features of Jerry Buffin.

The spell was broken. With a fearful cry she sprung from the spot. In reality she had half struggled to her feet, and the violent contusion of her head against the rock above awoke her to a knowledge of the fact that she was but dreaming. Anxiously she glanced about, fearful lest her dreams should have been only premonitory warnings of some danger even then brooding over her.

But she beheld no one. Approaching the opening, she saw that evening shades were fast descending. Already it was quite dark in the gulch.

"I shall not be discovered before morning," she soliloquized. "Oh, how weary and sleepy I feel. I will sleep for a time, and when I wake again I shall be ready to start homeward."

She retired to the rocky cell once more, where she was soon wrapped in a slumber sounder and more refreshing than any which had yet visited her eyelids.

CHAPTER XIII.

"DO I WAKE?"

NOT until the dawn of morning had come did Rose fully awaken. She knew that another day had come, because it was growing dark with her last conscious recollection, and now she saw, by looking from the opening in front, that a strong light pervaded the outer world.

Partially rising, as she was able to do in the confined space, she found herself feeling much better than she could reasonably have expected. Although somewhat sore and stiff, she well knew that a little exercise would remove it in a great degree.

Rose was on the point of moving into the open air, had taken a step or two, in fact, when she heard a sound from without which caused her to pause and turn deadly pale. She sunk upon the rock and covered her face with her hands. She was trembling, and seemed weighed down with mortal terror.

And well. It was the voice of Jerry which she heard, just without the opening. He seemed soliloquizing with himself, though each word was perfectly distinct to the affrighted listener.

"Strange whar she's gone," he muttered. "Can't be her neck was broke som'ers and we've overlooked her, 'case we've looked every-whar whar a gal of her size could hev been put or hid herself. She ain't in this yere valley, nuther—that's purty sartin'. Now I'd like to know which way she's gone. One thing is sartin'; the gal's more'n common smart, and she's played her best keerds this time, of course. She knows it'd be most nateral for her to start straight hum. Now she thinks I'll look for her that

way, most likely, and she will take herself some other. B'lieve now she jumped off'n that hoss, and kinder sheered her course a little, and kep' on back amongst the mountains. I'll go off that way, and see if I can not track her out. I'll git the Pawnees to help me, and we'll s'arch around thar faithful to-day. If we can't find anything of her, we may as well give it up, and conclude she's fooled us, some way or another. But, I'll fix that some way. I'm a fool that I hadn't cut her head off, and doused her into the lake; then they might hev hunted till the sky faded out.

He seemed moving away as he spoke, and very soon Rose heard stones and gravel falling, which were dislodged by his feet as he climbed the sides of the embankment. Then it was that she began to breathe more freely. She realized that he was going away upon a false suspicion and as she knew of his whereabouts, it would be possible to make good progress on her homeward route before he should become satisfied that she was not amid the mountains, as he supposed.

Full of this idea she sprung to her feet, striking her head violently against the rock above as she did so. The movement and result awakened a new question. Had she really heard what she fancied to be the voice of her persecutor, or had she but dreamed it? This was certainly an important query. There could be no doubt but that she was awake now—was she in the same condition a few minutes previous? She had seen him once before, in dreams, quite as plainly as she heard his voice now. The former was certainly a delusion; might not the latter have been the same?

Utterly alone with her doubts and fears, there was but one way of solving the vexing question. She must ascertain whether he had been in the vicinity by traces left in quitting the place.

Certain that he must be safely away, she at last ventured forth, and began to look for signs, after satisfying herself that she was not observed. She had not much looking to do, however. Just at the mouth of the opening she found a puddle of tobacco-juice, which he had evidently ejected while resting there. Foot-prints, too, without number, showed conclusively that she had heard words which fell from the lips of her persecutor, and not from the fancied image of a dream.

Convinced in this respect, she set off at once, since there was nothing to detain her. Hunger was now loud in its demands, but she had no food with which to satisfy it, and, comforting herself with the assurance that she should meet no more adventures until she reached home, the heroic maiden really dispelled the cravings of appetite with the power of her will.

Upon climbing the steep ascent which led to the open forest, Rose found that she was very weak, and for a moment feared lest she should be unable to reach home. But, the cheer of the thought of escape, and dread of failure, operated so powerfully upon her nervous system, that she soon forgot all fatigue and weakness.

The course adopted by Pat Smithers had been due southeast, and this course she resolved to pursue, so nearly as she could travel by sun and wind.

An hour passed, and she was making rapid progress. Occasionally she stopped to pluck an edible leaf or berry, but as they only seemed to increase rather than allay her hunger, she did not often pause to gather them. Her brain was filled with all manner of pleasant thoughts, and upon reaching a large log she sprung upon it. With a quick cry of horror she staggered back, and sunk upon the ground nearly insensible.

"Ha, ha! my beauty! Now I've got ye ag'in!" the coarse, harsh voice of Jerry exclaimed. "Blowed if I think you'll fool me ag'in as neat as ye done this time. Whar's that yere pistil? I must hev that!"

He searched for it, but in vain.

"So, I was a fool after all," he muttered. "But it don't make any great odds. Come, my hoss is over yender a ways, but you're so smart on the hoof that it won't trouble you any. Come, budge, I say!"

He dragged her along in the most brutal manner, making all sorts of threats, and embellishing them with the most revolting oaths.

The truth was, the soliloquy which she had heard was delivered especially to mislead her. Jerry had discovered her presence in the rocky cleft the evening before, and had kept careful watch that she did not leave the place unnoticed by him. He would have forced his disagreeable presence upon her there, but feared the pistol, which he supposed yet in her possession. Remaining at hand, however, he watched until she awoke, when he recited the sentence which he had been carefully arranging in his mind. Certain that the bait was swallowed, he hastened away, and planted himself in her path. The result we have seen.

It seemed a long distance back to the place where the villain had left his horse. Nearly all the weary steps which Rose had taken in coming were retraced, and finally they drew near the chasm again.

The search had been given up by the Indians the preceding day, partly because they saw no chance of success, and partly because they were disgusted with the manner of Jerry. The villain was now alone, and successful. How he exulted over the fact.

Very soon they approached the horse, which was tied to a sapling.

"Now, my fine lady," he said, "I am goin' tew treat ye tew a ride on hossback, and if ye don't mind yer hisness—"

"No you don't, old fellow!" rung out a clear, manly voice from a tree six feet away. "No you don't; you've run your race!"

With a whoop and a shout, half a dozen stout pioneers sprung from covers near by, and before Jerry could realize their presence, he was firmly held by the arms.

Rose realized that she had met friends, and with a glad cry she sunk to the earth, while all around her was wrapped in a vail of darkness.

"See to her; she has fainted," said Jerry, with well-counterfeited alarm.

The effect was what he had anticipated. His arms were partially released, and availing himself of the movement, he broke away from his captors and ran like a startled deer.

But he did not go far. Two rifles cracked in

quick succession, and at the second report he pitched headlong to the earth. He was not killed, however. One leg was broken, near the knee, by the bullet, and he was pretty effectually disabled from further resistance.

Before he could produce the weapons for which his hands involuntarily sought, he was deprived of them, and then borne back to the place of rendezvous. His rage was fearful to behold, but perfectly harmless, so that little attention was paid to it by those about.

As Rose opened her eyes to conscious things, she heard a brief exclamation from one of the men standing near her.

"There they come. Won't we see some tall feelin' when they find out we've got her?"

Looking in the direction indicated by the speaker, she saw her uncle, accompanied by Lawrence Estey and one or two other men, approaching. Summoning all her strength, she rushed forth to meet them, calling those dearest to her by name.

The meeting which followed may be better imagined than described. Lawrence reached the maiden first, and clasped her in his arms. In a few moments he gathered the assurance that they were not too late to fully save her, and then he turned her over to the hands of the tearful uncle.

His heart was swelling with indignation against the man who had carried this fiendish attempt onward so far; but when he saw the suffering, rage and terror of the wounded wretch, he refrained from any taunts. Others, however, were not so considerate, and poured upon the head of Jerry all the rage which they felt at his shameful transactions.

"Say, Jonson," exclaimed a sturdy young settler, "we represent about all the law in town. Let's know what we're goin' to dew with this outrageous scamp."

"My mind," said an older and very quiet man, "is that we let the girl tell us her story, and then decide what 'tis best to dew with him. What say?"

The idea was generally commended; and after she had been provided with food, and allowed a few minutes to calm her nerves, Rose proceeded to relate all that had happened since she was conveyed from her chamber, up to the present moment.

The full measure of Jerry's guilt seemed to shock all who heard it. That he could so coolly and causelessly murder a fellow-being, seemed almost impossible. And yet, none doubted the entire truth of the statement, although the subject often exclaimed in loud and angry tones that it was entirely false.

"Well, men," said Jonson, when the story was ended, "what is to be done with such a man? Now do not speak rashly."

"I reckon he's done mischief enough," finally suggested one,

And then came the verdict. It was unanimous, that the offender be placed beyond any possibility of rendering further trouble to the more peaceably-disposed settlers. A committee was at once chosen to arrange for the carrying out of the proposed penalty, and while this was being done, Lawrence and Maurice Jonson removed Rose to a quiet spot at a little distance. Here she was made acquainted with the causes which led to her rescue.

Obtaining some proofs that she was somewhere upon the mountains, a muster party had been fitted out by Lawrence to search for her. They succeeded in finding the trail which led away from the lake, and followed it a long distance. Soon after losing it they encountered the two Indians whom Jerry had hired to assist him in the search. They had directed the party toward the chasm, and just before Jerry came in sight, they found the horse. Taking to cover, they waited for his approach.

As the recital was completed, there came a heavy volley of rifles, and soon after a man appeared, leading one of the horses which the villain had stolen. A glance of inquiry shot from Lawrence to him.

The fellow—a tall, awkward youth, who had once been a lover of Rose—remarked, casting a side glance at the maiden.

"Allus seemed to me best fer a feller, if he got the mitten, to go about his own bisness, and not meddle any more."

Having delivered himself of this, he left the horse, and hastened back to join a party engaged in excavating a rude grave. The object of it we need not mention.

An hour later a happy, but by no means jubilant, party turned their faces toward the settlement. It was not till late the following day that they reached it. Rose was so utterly exhausted that some weeks elapsed before she fully recovered. But with kind friends near her, who were but too pleased to render any service in their power, she could not long remain an invalid.

When her health was fully restored, another marriage-day was set, and this time there was no failure. Everything passed off as pleasantly as the most sanguine could have hoped. Lawrence and Rose (now Mrs. Estey) were supremely happy, and in the evening there was a general merry-making in the new house, which true-hearted friends had joined in erecting for Mr. Jonson, upon the site of the one which had been burned during that night of horrors.

But, upon that night, one who had previously been conspicuous in every merrymaking was absent, and if any one thought of the fact, none spoke the dishonored name.

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